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HUGH MILLER

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HUGH MILLER

A CRITICAL STUDY

BY

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CHAPTER I

EARLY LIFE AND TRAINING

LIFE in Scotland a hundred years ago was less centralised and more deliberate than it is to-day. The ferment and activities of religious strifes and protestations had subsided : there was, for the time, a calm ere acute internal conflict broke out again, partly on the old but predominantly along new lines. As the ecclesiastical obsession weakened, Scotland had blossomed out into literary and philosophic splendour. Edinburgh was still, in a representative as well as a departmental sense, the capital. The smaller towns had not yet sunk to the position of supply-

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agencies for the exhausting demands of great industrial centres. Most of them nourished each a culture-life of its own, and possessed something more than a merely geographical individuality.

In particular, thus flourished Cromarty at the tip of that almost insular promontory dividing the Beaully and Cromarty Firths. Its population—about 1500—was small, but, so far, unsifted. Highland roads being still few and utterly bad, and its harbour safe and extensive, the port was a natural centre for the distribution of goods to adjoining districts. It had a hempen factory whose business with the more enterprising dependents migrated later, in the “killing time” of local industries, to the neighbourhood of Dundee. There was a valuable provision trade: the herring-fishery was rising to the commercial

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surface once again ; and there were minor export trades able, in a small way, to make a living. Active and retired officers, military, naval and mercantile ; descendants of cadet members of old Highland families ; busy professional and business men and operatives, with all else that goes to constitute a thriving, self-contained community, lent dignity and variety to the town life.

Mental culture, though theologically bottomed, was still not quite meagre, nor confined to the well-to-do class. The parish had, of course, its grammar school boasting among its alumni of one pre-Reform member of Parliament and a University Professor. Among the townfolk were men who had roamed the world a bit, returning with a stock of "moving accidents by flood and field." There were libraries too, not alto-

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gether theological, in some of the barest homes. At a slightly later date it might be said that, "There was not much admiration of poets or poetry in the place"; later, that "Literature is not so much thought of in Cromarty as the curing of herrings," and that, "By much the greater half of the collective mind of the town is vested in the ladies." But such an unhappy state of affairs seems incident to absorbing commercial speculation even on a small scale. And under it all lurked covert litterateurs, unprinted practitioners in verse and prose, with the tradition verbal and documentary of such in the past.

Thus between the old Scotland and the new, and on the turning crest of a wave of local prosperity, was born Hugh Miller on the 10th October, 1802, in a long, receding house "three rooms in length, but with the windows

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of its second story half-buried in the eaves." This "rather humble erection" had been raised for his ancestor John Feddes from the gains of a buccaneering past of about five years in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. Discerners of distributive justice in human affairs might perhaps, for the present case, find its operation in the fact that the family fed the sea with its best blood for two generations. No one was better at this sort of moral exercise than Miller himself, but then Feddes was his great-grandfather, and he had a grim pride in the secular tragedy. On his mother's side there were fighting seamen also, but more prominent is the religious strain. Here Donald Ross, Roy (the red) a contemporary of the buccaneer, is the dominant personality. He was a non-intrusionist and seceder of an older light,

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and a prophet or seer after the order of the covenanting Peden. It is one of Hugh's shrewd observations that "in the religious history of Scotland, the eighteenth century of the Highland and semi-Highland districts of the north corresponds in many of its traits to the seventeenth century of the Saxon-peopled districts of the south." Present-day religious phenomena show that the relation still holds good.

Miller has left us a skilfully composed and sympathetic sketch of his father, whom he figures as of slow but volcanic temper, resolute, self-reliant and resourceful. When a man of forty-four he married Hugh's mother who was only eighteen. The boy was the first fruit of the union, and had but turned five when the sea for the last time claimed its toll of the family, and the young wife was a widow.

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We gather that she was a woman of highly neurotic constitution, abnormally sensitive to supernatural suggestion and the like ; and a copious and skilful retailer of such experiences. Her employment in the making of burial clothes, conducted with all the circumstance of ghostly significance in the dim interior of a house itself written over with superstitions, would often drive the staring boy to his closet bed in a state of quivering horror. Such an influence was bound to root itself deep in his mind. Thence came, too, a large contribution to his stock of witch-tales and folk literature. And the strength of the youthful impression is witnessed by the fact that Miller, though ever reticent in express belief, and ready to suggest, where possible, a material explanation of the ghostly machinery, could never rid himself of a

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powerful bias towards accepting supernatural appearances—"his mind," said Dick,¹ "was touched somehow by superstition"—; so that, when the break-down came, the resurrected hags and witches of his boyhood rode the captive brain to its death.

Hugh's father, then, having perished at sea, such paternal guidance as could take his place was supplied by the twin influences of his maternal uncles. Of them it may be said that whatever measure of enduring fame Hugh Miller has heaped up for himself, is bound to let fall some crumbs for the men whose characters he has so filially delineated. That the dead hand of Donald Roy should tend to keep them in the pietistic succession

¹ Robert Dick of Thurso, baker, botanist and geologist : a friend and correspondent of Miller. All references to him are based upon the biography by Smiles.

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might have been expected. But more important is the happy fact that James Wright was a parochial antiquary and historian, silent himself but destined to find utterance by the pen of his pupil; while Alexander was a practical naturalist who first opened to the inquisitive boy the inexhaustible volume whose early chapters he was one day to read in the hearing of the English-speaking world. Thus the main lines of Miller's intellectual activity are foreshadowed; subsequent contacts and influences serve but to deepen the impressions so inherited and acquired.

In dealing with a genius of humble origin, there prevails a sort of dramatic convention of isolating his mental infancy. To heighten his after attainments he is made to figure as, to the ordinary eye, a blockhead upon whom mere schooling could make no impression, or

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as a portent who really did not need it. There is a popular delusion of this type with respect to Burns ; it exists also in the case of Miller. True, he has deliberately fostered it, speaking of himself in divers places as a "dunce"; in the letter to Lord Brougham as "a plain, untaught man"—where every sentence rings denial—and lamenting at the close of the autobiography that, "right use of the opportunity afforded me in early youth would have made me a scholar ere my twenty-fifth year, and have saved to me at least ten of the best years of life."

In view of the ambiguity of such terms as "education," "scholar" and "culture," it will be best to set forth the data upon which an opinion can be framed. Miller was at school for ten years. His uncles, shrewd enough men, believed that he had in him the making

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of a scholar. His teacher too thought so when he placed Miller in the select Latin class of the grammar school, to which none but his most promising lads might be admitted. He had noticed Hugh's remarkable familiarity with English literature, enabling him when forgetting the word required to substitute a synonym ; and had singled him out as one capable of appreciating the subtler qualities of a literary exercise. The boy's story-telling powers found eager audience among his school-fellows and brought him the pedagogical nickname of "The *Sennachie*" (Gaelic : story-teller). The neighbours styled him "the Philosopher" because of his astronomical knowledge and speculations. He was an omnivorous reader, having the run of between four and five hundred volumes covering travels, tales, poetry, belles-lettres,

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theology and science; and suiting his tastes and powers as they developed. Some few foreign works he knew in translations—"was there not Zimmerman on Solitude?" His outside interests and games even were bookish. Of every one of any literary accomplishment accessible to him he claimed mental kinship; and was himself the laureate of his own adventures and his wrongs. He had probably a better acquaintance with the literature of the English and Scots tongue, and, within that limit, a wider range of intellectual interests when his schooling came in his fifteenth year to a rather ludicrous end, than any but the exceptional boy of an average modern school. His uncle's ambition was to send him to college, and some may be ready to deplore the fact that he did not go. But then, as Stevenson has it, "Schools and

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colleges, for one great man whom they complete, perhaps unmake a dozen." And if any speculation amounting almost to certainty can be made in the matter it is that, with his bias of mind, Miller, at college, would have followed in the estimable footsteps of the school dux, and functioned as an excellent but mere clergyman.

What is safely predicable is that Miller failed to acquire a thorough training in the elementary subjects, and could not accommodate his restless, brooding spirit to the necessary drudgery of school work. He was a bit wild, rebellious and truant, as on one side it was ever his nature to be. Of course it was all very sad, and had to be paid for in even closer drudgery afterwards. What else—except some mechanical Latin and Greek—the Grammar School could have given him

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does not appear. And, like Herbert Spencer, he "effectually resisted classical culture," finding the Latin rudiments but an uninteresting maze to which he could discover no key. Probably, then, Miller, for lack of technical accomplishment—which, indeed, was ever with him a weakness—would not have achieved much academic distinction, but he would certainly have impressed a discerning judge as a boy of no ordinary parts.

What less is to be said of one who selected the trade of a stone-mason because of the opportunities it gave for observation, and the leisure it would afford him during the winter months for the study of literature? It was rough, trying work to which he was setting his hand. It dragged him over the country, everywhere poorly fed and piggishly housed; in the company of men with whom, beyond

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his day's "darg," he had scarcely anything in common: and it tasked his growing strength till, at times, his head spun from very weariness and the blood oozed from his abraded fingers. Finally the stone-cutting started in his irritated lungs "the stone-cutter's malady," which once threatened his life and left him, at that organ, permanently weak. Observing all this, we wonder at his reiterated references to those days as "happy," at the romantic glamour to which he has subdued them, and his steady deprecations of industrial discontent; till we realise that, looking back from the editorial desk over years of unique preparation, he callously plays the literary man, aiming at an artistic and not a realistic result; and full besides of his gospel for those still in manual bondage—the obvious compensations there are for toil and discomfort

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in the study of nature and of good books—heightens accordingly the brighter colours of his picture and lightly passes over the shadows. How dark these in fact were, may be gathered from a rather more ingenuous document, the biographical sketch prepared in 1829 for Principal Baird. Contrast what follows with the charming detail and idyllic setting of such a description of quarry-work as that in the opening chapter of the *Old Red Sandstone* :—

“My first six months of labour presented only a series of disasters. I was at the time of a slender make and weak constitution, and I soon found I was ill-fitted for such employments as the trundling of loaded wheel-barrows over a plank, or the raising of huge blocks of stone out of quarry. My hands were soon fretted into large blisters, my breast became the seat of a dull, oppressive pain, and I was

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much distressed after exertion more than usually violent by an irregular motion of the heart. My spirits were almost always miserably low, and I was so wrapped up in a wretched apathetic absence of mind, that I have wrought for whole hours together with scarcely a thought of what I was doing myself, and scarcely conscious of what others were doing round me." Miller as surely suffered for this premature physical overstrain as Burns did, and the reason why he did not take to the latter's refuge in strong drink is the subject of another pretty literary effect. In the autobiography he tells us, with fine appropriateness and didactic possibilities, that it was because he found that a biggish "dram" on a certain occasion rendered him incapable of reading a favourite author—Bacon—on account of "the letters dancing before my

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eyes." Follows a wise resolution, never departed from, to observe the strictest moderation. But the sequence of cause and effect in the sketch is much less dramatic, though—without quite giving up the Baconian interlude—more humanly acceptable. "It is probable," he says, "that the want of money alone prevented me from indulging, at this period, in the low vice of dram-drinking." By the time the money came the temptation was no more insistent and the temperate habit had been formed. Thus was Miller helped to avoid the pit into which Burns, in much the same circumstances, had promptly fallen.

Yet he did not neglect or despise the work by which he had to earn his bread. He gave it his honest attention, doing this as he did everything else, with all his might; took pride in being a skilful workman, and de-

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veloped its intellectual side in the study of architecture and decorative sculpture. But not for a moment did he imagine that he had said the last word in his ambitions. Even now when things looked most against him he "dared to believe that literature, and, mayhap, natural science, were, after all, my proper vocations." In fact Miller, like Burns, "panted after distinction." His was a strong individuality ; he took himself seriously ; like all men of genius whose cerebral capacity is fed by an exceptional flow of energy, he was a frank egotist. In his boyhood this quality expressed itself in violent impatience of all restraint : to meet possible encroachments by his uncles on a liberty which had become licence, he put a knife in his pocket. All through his manhood it is present as a morbid self-consciousness and fear of assault ;

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hence the ever-ready and finally disastrous pistol. In his last illness he slept in a room that looked like nothing so much as the conventional pirate's cabin. In the tamer literary form his egotism appears as a "love of power or fame" when he confesses that "motives of this kind . . . have great influence over me," and that he purposes "exercising the pen . . . that I may be known"; or, of an even earlier time, "I was dreaming behind my apron of poets and poetry, and of making myself a name"; above all, in the Titanic resolution after realising his failure as a poet: "if nature has bestowed upon me that spirit of genius which ultimately can neither be repressed nor hidden, then, though fortune should serve me as Jupiter did Briareus when he buried him under Etna, I shall assuredly overturn the mountain." At the age of

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twenty-six, his programme of work includes a set of miscellaneous essays to be entitled "The Egotist," in which, his biographer remarks, "it seems probable he would be the central figure." There is, too, a letter to Miss Dunbar in the way of consoling her for a recent bereavement, which he fills with an analysis of "that process of suffering of which my own mind has been the subject" on a like occasion; carrying it on in right sermonic fashion to "grief in the third and last stage!" One is reminded of the small share which "the hapless youth" gets in "Lycidas," compared with the sublimely self-conscious author. It need not be said that through it all Miller is palpably sincere and kindly intentioned. Notable, too, in this connection, though, perhaps, to us in the lapse of time not of such obvious force, is the spectacle of Miller writing

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down the details of his own love-story, and even of his housekeeping beginnings, in his own paper, "for all the world to see," while his wife was still living, and he himself a familiar figure in the public eye. To such a performance so circumstanced no parallel exists in literary history. More subtly the sense of personality expresses itself in certain peculiarities of dress—the inseparable shepherd's plaid clearly defining him alike in church courts and scientific assemblages—and in half-jocular interest in his huge, untidy head, whose strange shape had led the midwife at his birth to diagnose idiocy.

His present occupation then, in the intervals of manual toil, is to lay surely the foundations of literary success. He tried handbooks on composition, but with a sigh at his indolence and "volatility of mind" revolted as usual

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from the former discipline, and resolved "to become a correct writer in the manner in which Cowley¹ became a grammarian"; that is, by familiarising himself with the writings of "correct" authors, studying his models closely, and practising the expression of his own thoughts in a "correct" manner—having himself, more exacting than any, for critic—in long, elaborate letters to his friends; sometimes at the height of his correspondence, writing as many as twenty a week. And the result of all his prodigious labour is that Miller

¹ "I was then, too, so much an enemy to all constraint, that my masters could never prevail on me, by any persuasions or encouragements, to learn without book the common rules of grammar, in which they dispensed with me alone, because they found I made a shift to do the usual exercises out of my own reading and observation." Cowley, *Of Myself*. From Cowley, Miller probably took also the trick of interspersing his autobiography with portions of his poetical compositions.

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comes to his readers as primarily a man with a style. His severest critics vie with his warmest defenders in eulogising the merits of his literary expression. Mr Spencer, otherwise frankly hostile, reviewing certain pieces of villainous English written by men in exalted life, trained to the highest pitch in the "literary culture" of the time, asks as the climax of his scorn over the ineffectiveness of that culture even within its own sphere, "imagine such a sentence coming from Hugh Miller?" (*The Study of Sociology*, p. 269). And we approve his conclusion that in the case of literary production, results are not proportionate to appliances, and that, as we are in process of seeing, "the relation is by no means a simple one." Hugh Miller became a stone-mason in order to learn how to write.

CHAPTER II

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So far, then, have we been able to follow Miller in the careful training of himself for literary achievement. Without exactly playing "the sedulous ape," he studies closely the general form, the tones and turns of expression characterising a well-defined group of writers, and shapes his own performance accordingly. It need not, therefore, be pronounced either futile or pedantic to endeavour to trace out more closely some of the affinities of Miller's style with the materials he so used. No analysis, indeed, can cumulatively explain the total result: style is a compound, not a mere

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literary mixture. Short of that, however, we can surely work to fuller knowledge and a clearer definition of the constituents, and so open the way to a keener appreciation of the whole.

Happily Miller has left us in no doubt as to his models and standards. He is confessedly of the Augustans, the men of Queen Anne's time, and the prose-writers who derived from them. He did not make literature of the vernacular as Burns did ; that was possible only for a poet. He sought his models where every educated Scotsman did till the time of the Carlyle fashion, and was the last notable exponent in a dying mode. When Baron Hume declared that he excelled in "that classical style" with which his contemporaries had lost touch, Hugh modestly explained that he owed the merit "chiefly to

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accident; to having kept company with the older English writers—the Addison, Pops, and Robertsons of the last century.” And he goes on to say, “the tone of these earlier writers I have, I daresay, contrived in some measure to catch.” The selection here is evidently summary, and the list may be easily extended by further testimony, both circumstantial and explicit.

Thus Miller’s prose taken generally, is of the “middle style,” the peculiar achievement of the eighteenth century writers, “familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious”—Johnson’s characterisation—which, if it never rises to the convoluted sublimity of the earlier men, never, on the other hand, sinks to the commonplace of colloquialism. It cannot be held that it is a style capable of the effects which have been drawn in modern

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times from a critical return to more archaic sources ; but then, on the other hand, it is not, for ordinary purposes, so dangerous a medium, nor does it run such a risk of affectation and painful artificiality. For use in scientific exposition its fitness is unquestionable.

Miller had an early and close acquaintance with the *Spectator* papers. After their manner the unborn *Egotist* was conceived. Plainly his notion of "correctness" meant to a large degree a following of Addison whom he "had known so long, and, in his true poems, his prose ones, had loved so much." But his more serious range of subjects, and his more serious and direct treatment of them, were bound to react upon his forms of expression. It is with Addison in his graver moods that he has most in common. It is probably, in

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the main, owing to his influence that Miller's prose is predominantly loose rather than periodic. The following sentences, for example, where the main thought is stated at the outset, and the rest is attached as elaboration or development, are typical:—"The moon, nearly at full, was riding high overhead in a troubled sky, pouring its light by fits, as the clouds passed, on the grey ruins, and the mossy, tilt-like hillocks, which had been raised ages before over the beds of the sleepers. The deep, dark shadows of the tombs seemed stamped upon the sward, forming, as one might imagine, a kind of general epitaph upon the dead, but inscribed, like the handwriting on the wall, in the characters of a strange tongue."

But while Miller thus far resembles Addison, he does so with a difference. His

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sentences are more closely and correctly compacted ; probably he owed this feature to the example of precisian purity in the Scotch writers of whom Robertson, mentioned above, is one. Rarely indeed does he get caught, as Addison was so often, in the peculiar fault of the loose style, a huddling together of explanatory clauses, or a careless arrangement with an incongruous result. He is also much more metaphorical in language. Intermit- tently, indeed, we have short lyric-like embellishments, the graftings of a poetic fancy— Spencer grants him “a large amount of poetry” —on the stouter stem of prose. Where Addison seeks a pathetic relief in Orientalised or barbaric imaginings, Miller supplies it direct from natural impressions or homely reflection. The free use of metaphor, too, on the part of the disciple results in a more vivid, if less insinu-

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ating effect. His prose is felt in consequence to have more "blood and juice."

Nor is there anything of the "gentle satirist": indeed it is but a Thackerayan hallucination with respect to Addison, whose satire has more conspicuously the note of cynical malice, daintily as it is disguised. But this was foreign to Miller's nature. If he dislikes a man or an opinion, he says so, with literary grace and satiric phrase it may be, but at least with no ambiguity. Setting aside his occasional viciousness, and lack of humorous toleration towards men and things outwith his sympathies, we may, for continuous ease and grace of diction, compare Miller more closely with Goldsmith than with any other. From Goldsmith he illustrates and quotes with exceptional frequency, especially in his earlier works where such

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influences as we have been considering will, naturally, be more apparent. Many passages indeed, in their balanced rhythm and sententious movement, almost seem modelled on analogous trains of thought from the earlier writer's pen.

Ultimately it is possible to trace this balanced, antithetical fashion to the judicial Johnson, whose customary syntactical suit it had become. There is occasionally, too, in Miller something of the Johnsonian rotundity of phrase, of which the neatest example is his turning out a familiar saying in the form, "Absence, though it rather strengthens than diminishes a true attachment," etc. We note the same ponderous influence in the way in which our author, though as careful of his transitions and culminations as a De Quincey could have wished, approaches detail over the

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shoulder of some comprehensive principle thereby to be illustrated or concretely embodied. The second letter on the *Herring Fishery in the Moray Firth* (1829) opens thus: "Dr Currie, the elegant and philosophical biographer of Burns, has remarked that knowledge, which some have defined to be power and others happiness, may with safety be considered as motion. He has said that it raises men to an eminence from whence they take within the sphere of their vision a large portion of the globe, and discover advantage at a great distance on its surface." And thus loftily we are introduced to a narrative of how the Cromarty fishermen, suffering from the failure of the fishing in their own firth, turned to account what they were hearing of its success at Wick by sailing thither to participate. The trick is, of course,

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older than Johnson ; may in fact be dubbed the "classical" or grand style of literary attack ; and was in form congenial to Miller's thought procedure. But it was the "great moralist" who gave it vogue as a literary pattern. It is allied with a grandiose style of reference to authors as the "learned," the "philosophical," the "ingenious" and so forth. In Miller's case, however, the sharpness of controversy and the practice of the inductive method in science, gradually filed down these formalisms very considerably.

Miller has been specifically praised for his descriptive powers. In landscape his success seems to be due to a certain architectural power, careful selection of detail and the elegance of language in which the whole is presented. But he does not paint on such a large canvas as Carlyle, nor with such inter-

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pretative insight. In fact his general method may be reduced to a simple formula. There is first a broad mapping out of his subject with the eye of the builder and geologist—the geological structure of landscape he rightly held should be studied with as much care by the painter as the anatomical structure of the body—then a dabbing in of the bolder colours, directed usually again by the geological interest, since “The colouring of the landscape is well-nigh as intimately connected with its geology as the drawing”; and finally a filling in of striking features clearly located or merely picturesquely grouped. Emphasis upon one or other of these essentials gives variety to the general method.

A fondness for colour indeed distinguishes most of Miller's landscapes. As a young man he had practised painting, and the highly

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varied programme of his purposes at twenty-six includes quite a number of contemplated pictures. A similar descriptive tendency was remarked by Ruskin of Sir Walter Scott. Thus, for Miller, the southern shore of the Moray Firth with its numerous little towns is "a belt of purple speckled with pearls." This characteristic touch may be exemplified from almost any relevant portion of his work. The practice was deliberately cultivated for geological reasons.

In the following it is almost absent, while we have, however, a favourable instance of the other qualities remarked upon. Moreover, such success with valley portraiture is rare in literature. We are looking at Shenstone's Leasowes. Attention is first fixed on a hill of the Lower Coal Measures, a "huge blister of millstone grit. . . . Let the reader imagine

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it of soft, swelling outline, and ample base, with the singularly picturesque trap range full in front, some four miles away, and a fair rural valley lying between. Let him further imagine the side hill furrowed by a transverse valley, opening at right angles into the great front valley, and separating a-top into two forks, or branches, that run up, shallowing as they go, to near the hill-top. Let him, in short, imagine this great valley a broad right line, and the transverse forked valley a gigantic letter Y resting on it. And the forked valley on the hill-side—this gigantic letter Y—is the Leasowes. The picturesqueness of such a position can be easily appreciated. The forked valley, from head to gorge, is a reclining valley, partaking along its bottom of the slope of the eminence on which it lies, and thus possessing, what is by no means

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common among the valleys of England, true downhill water-courses, along which the gathered waters may leap in a chain of cascades; and commanding in its upper recesses, though embraced and sheltered on every side by the surrounding hill, extending prospects to the country below. It thus continues the scenic advantages of both hollow and rising ground—the quiet seclusion of the one, and the expansive landscapes of the other. The broad valley into which it opens is rich and well wooded. Just in front of the opening we see a fine sheet of water, about twenty acres in extent, the work of the monks; immediately to the right stand the ruins of the abbey; immediately to the left, the pretty, compact town of Hales Owen lies grouped around its fine old church and spire; a range of green, swelling eminences

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rises beyond ; beyond these, fainter in the distance, and considerably bolder in the outline, ascends the loftier range of the trap hills—one of the number roughened by the tufted woods, and crowned by the obelisk at Hagley ; and, over all, blue and shadowy on the far horizon, sweeps the undulating line of the mountains of Cambria.”

What we, trained in a later school, miss in such descriptions is the human interest. There is no attempt to connect the external manifestations with the springs of emotion in the way Carlyle, even in a phrase, could do so happily ; as of St Edmondsbury “looking out right pleasantly, from its hill-slope, towards the rising sun.” Admirably perceived and represented though they are, Miller’s pictures usually leave us cold, and unaffected by any feelings other than those of interest and

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admiration. They, too often, as in the present case, lack individuality of impression ; so that corner of country must have looked to any intelligent observer, albeit ungifted to describe and group its features in orderly sequence.

Miller himself speaks of his elaborate description of the Leasowes rather deprecatingly as simply "hard anatomy." These asides of "self-criticism" are never astray. But with his limited resources he is scarcely able to escape such a result. Colour which he uses so freely elsewhere as a relief is here practically absent ; then his landscapes are always as we have noted—as was also the case with Scott—absolutely objective and divorced from the personal impression ; while the only bit of his technique so far not referred to is the atmospheric, which is

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curiously confined to the effects of a rich sunset—in the present instance not permissible. The result, as he perceives, is a certain hardness, which indeed, in some degree, is a quality of all his landscape work.

The same lack of sympathetic insight is felt in his personal portraits. Individual externals are keenly discerned and clearly reproduced. "Click-clack was a rough-looking fellow, turned of forty, of about five feet ten, with a black, unshaven beard, like a shoe-brush stuck under his nose, which was red as a coal, and attired in a sadly-breached suit of Aberdeen grey, topped by a brimless hat, that had been borrowed, apparently, from some obliging scarecrow." This much, vivid and exact, our author can do by skilful choice and arrangement of material. But all through the sketch we feel that the note of "inward-

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ness" is wanting, only to be supplied indeed by that neutral humour which Miller, whose fun is usually rather grim, did not possess. There is, in consequence, a defect of sympathy, the place of which is taken by strong ethical and religious prejudices, narrowly limiting his treatment of character. Humour of narration he certainly has, where the matter is indifferent or of slight importance. But character and conduct are always for Miller too serious things to be treated otherwise than at the bar of judgment. The result is sentence or sentimentalism. This defect is less apparent where his method gets a freer field in the admirable reconstructions from tradition "of a bygone state of society" in a little Scotch town. It is most palpable in his tales, where it is the chief reason for that lack of dramatic power, noted by Mr Carruthers

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with respect to *Scenes and Legends*, and referred to by Mrs Miller in her preface to *Tales and Sketches*. It is for this reason that so many of these stop short of only the highest excellence.

As for the use he makes of the "red" glow of the setting sun, it is so frequent as to become a mannerism. Scores of examples might be cited. Proximately it may be due to a morbid fondness for lonely evening walks in lugubrious places; but the fact that his imaginary meetings with Ferguson and Burns also take place in romantic situations, "fronting the setting sun," and "in strong red light," respectively, suggests for such a predilection a sentimental basis.

The power of grasping and grouping detail was particularly useful to the geologist. The clearness and effectiveness of his scientific

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exposition have always been recognised for a distinction as meritorious as it is rare. Subordinately, of course, it is further due to a readiness in concrete familiar illustration. The flattened head of *Cephalaspis* is like "a saddler's cutting-knife"; the markings on the mail covering of *Osteolepis* "lie as thickly as the circular perforations in a lace veil"; the dorsal fins of *Cheiracanthus* are like "two lug-sails stiffly extended." Viewed from the Cromarty Firth, the "lofty promontory" of the Black Isle resembles "a huge spear thrust horizontally into the sea, a ponderous mass of granitic gneiss, of about a mile in length, forming the head, and a rectilinear line of the Old Red Sandstone, more than ten miles in length, forming the shaft." This aptness of homely and pungent illustration at times, it is true, but forged

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fetters for the mind. He was determined, as we shall see, to have the central nucleus of the Highlands set in a "frame" of Old Red Sandstone, and he fought to the end against surrendering his besetting simile.

But while the details are thus picturesquely conceived, his powerful handling of them seems due to that synoptic habit of mind which we have already noticed as a feature of his literary method. He confesses himself "altogether deficient in the cleverness that can promptly master isolated details, when in ignorance of their bearing on the general scheme to which they belong." This remark, applicable all round, has place in an account of how he finally mastered book-keeping as a bank clerk. It is the secret of his power of scientific exposition.

Summarily Miller's style may be truthfully

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said to answer to Arnold's quasi-definition of the "classical" as "perfect in lucidity, measure, and propriety." But I cannot conceive how Bayne¹ can speak of it as "artless," or Sir Henry Craik (*English Prose*, vol. v.) as "natural," or, least of all, Mr M'Carthy as "spontaneous" (*History of Our Own Time*, iv. 229). As a style it is, as we have seen, highly figurative and allusive; the transitions and openings are carefully managed; the total effect, without verbosity, is melodious in a high degree. This last, again, is a strong Addisonian note. But Miller was a most laborious writer. He corrected and corrected again. "Chalmers remarked of him that, when he did go off, he was a great gun, and the reverberation of his shot was long audible,

¹ Peter Bayne in *Life and Letters of Hugh Miller*, which is referred to throughout.

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but he required a deal of time to load" (Bayne). Never was a style—easy to read, however hard in the writing, graceful and perspicuous—less the man, solidly and largely built, inelegant of dress and gait, and of mental habit laborious and comprehensive; whose speech, too, was not the "undefiled English" he wrote, but the "Cromarty Scotch," with a vowel system exemplified in the utterance, "the exc hed been bussy in the gleds." Dr M'Cosh records that in conversation "his thoughts came out tumbling with a freshness, an originality, and a power, which somewhat disappeared" in his formally written work. As a journalist, again, he took several proofs; while the crowning test was a *viva-voce* reading. He had no ear for pitch—was quite unmusical, in fact—but possessed a splendid perception of rhythm. To this quality he

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obviously attached supreme importance, presumably for Plato's reason that "rhythm and harmony find their way into the secret places of the soul, on which they mightily fasten." He avoids all harsh collocations of words and syllables, and in this endeavour his vocabulary never seems to fail him. The unbroken melody is apt to cloy ; one misses the sure idiomatic grip, unattainable by Scotch writers primly handling their English as they would a foreign tongue ; our later prose has become more daring and changeful in experiment. But for calm, polished excellence, for the dry light of the courtly Augustan utterance refracted through the rich mind of a parochial genius, Miller's prose work is eminently worthy of a niche in the literary temple. That was his earliest and his ever dominant ambition, and he would be a captious, clannish

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critic indeed who could raise his voice in dissent.

The *Poems of a Journeyman Mason* present a striking contrast to his prose. The two possess scarcely a feature in common. The poems have but rarely any imaginative interest, and sink under a weight of moral judgment and religious profession. Cold print unsealed Miller's eyes to their defects. He published them in a fit of pique at editorial neglect—"It would have been a greatly wiser act . . . had I put them into the fire instead." His narrow conception of poetic value may be judged from the pronouncement that Byron, Ovid, and Moore "fearfully misused the talents that God gave them"; and that "the Langhorns, Wartons, Kirke-Whites, Shelleys, Keatses—shall I venture to say it?—Byrons" (mark the grouping), "are flowers of the spring, to be

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read in careless youth if there is to be any appreciation!" The epilogue to the book of verse is apologetic—the serious pieces are recommended for their seriousness, while the lighter pieces, "though wild and fanciful, are not immoral." Not thus, however, is the volume to be saved from the aesthetic judgment, which may be expressed in one of his own lines: "O, it is drear, fearfully drear." Plainly Miller was right when he decided that for his type of thinking "the accomplishment of verse was too narrow." Carlyle and Ruskin, minds cast in the same mould, had to learn the same lesson.

CHAPTER III

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THE bulk and seriousness of Miller's later work has, unfortunately, obscured his earliest literary production on the scale of a volume, the *Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland* (1835). Yet in it his style is fully matured ; indeed of a grace and easy flow not subsequently shown till *My Schools and Schoolmasters*. In both he is on homely ground, and, not facing momentous issues in science or religion, at liberty to unbend. Such is not the case with him where we might expect it, in his correspondence ; which on the contrary is formal, stilted and platitudinous, especially in his early

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years when he was still fumbling heavily at the pen. The tradition of literary letter-writing was not yet out of fashion ; but in Miller's case there was more than this. His letters are really exercises on grave subjects in a style which does not come easily to him ; and it is no wonder that in them we have him probably at his worst.

Even in *Scenes and Legends* Robert Chambers found "the thinking pretty hard and solid," and suggested a little more "playful fancy" in dealing with "topographical narration, or the chronicling of old stories." From the subsequent editions Miller removed much of the "dissertation" and "abridged considerably" what was left. The result of such lightening was to quicken the circulation of the book in its later editions. Meantime he was supplementing the scanty earnings of his

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early married life by newspaper and magazine work, close and not always well-remunerated drudgery. *Scenes and Legends* was his formal introduction to the world of letters.

The subject of the volume is summarised in Chambers's words, and in the sub-title *The Traditionary History of Cromarty*; but, in fact, it is of wider range and more general importance; besides being, on the whole, even more in harmony with modern taste, than with that of Miller's own day. Then it was a pleasantly written volume of local tradition and curious, dying lore; to-day it has, or ought to have, a place as a unique historical document, and an independent contribution to what has since taken shape as a science of intellectual antiquities.

As already indicated, Miller's youth covered a period of swift transition, local and national.

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The old, historic, characteristic Scotland was passing away; national differentiation was fading into mere parochial difference. Customs, traditions, beliefs and practices were quickly falling into the oblivious wallet of Time. "The Sybilline tomes of tradition," says our author, "are disappearing in this part of the country one by one, and I find, like Selkirk in his island when the rich fruits of autumn were dropping around him, that if I myself do not preserve them, they must perish." He had the passing opportunity and inducement to the work, but that he should have discerned its necessity is as notable a tribute to his genius as any. The religious beliefs that mastered him were, later, when organised in the Church he helped to found, to treat such survivals in the Highlands as devices and decoys of the Enemy and to pluck them from the memory of

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the people for destruction. The "genteel" reading in which he was steeping his mind would scarcely have suggested the value of such mean and "barbaric" materials.¹ But Miller was a humanist; nothing human but had its interest for him; and behind him was the unconscious direction of his uncle James, a deeply religious man and yet a careful retailer of traditional lore, and withal a speculator upon its significance in the history of human knowledge. For the rest, every reflective Scotchman if not a theologian, is, at least, something of an historian.

Miller moved among a long-lived stock, and so was able, at second or third hand, to carry his oral records as far back as the year of the Reformation. From the latter half of

¹ Compare, for example, the frame of mind disclosed in Addison's paper on "Popular Superstitions," *Spectator* No. 7.

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the seventeenth century, too, there were still gleanings, and through the eighteenth century which so attracted the mind of Stevenson, and is destined yet to play a fuller part in Scottish literature, he moved with ease and security. Scarcely a hint, however, reaches us of the drink and dirt and other delinquencies of that time since made so familiar by a sensational use of literary materials; in the Cromarty of the early nineteenth century these things had not yet become strange. But we realise in careful detail the aspect of a typical Lowland town on the Highland border in the years before the Union: how its people lived and worked; its varying fortunes; and how affected it the historic calamities of famine, plague and war. Even its literary mechanics with their poems and treatises and diaries—a class of whom modern towns of the

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kind know all too little—attain a vicarious immortality. Much of his story-telling of course, as the author expressly states, has been worked over and filled in congruously with the leading features. In this volume, indeed, with its gallery of quaint, though rather stiff figures there is material which, with the technique and audience of half a century later, could have been put out to handsome usury.

The most notable of Miller's local predecessors in literature was the scholarly, euphuistic, swaggering, half-modern, half-mediæval figure, Sir Thomas Urquhart. He, too, had given Cromarty a history—crazily concocted on the patriotic lines of Boece and his set—ironically reproduced in outline by his later townsman. Miller can scarcely be said to have resolved the extraordinary intricacies

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and inconsistencies of such a character, with whom he could have had but little intellectual sympathy. To decide that he was "a kind of intellectual monster—a sort of moral centaur," is to remove him from the category of reality to that of the fabulous, and to add mystification to complexity. Still, Miller's chapter remains the best short account of one who, for all his crotchets, cannot be forgotten.

If, however, he is tender to Sir Thomas's anti-Presbyterianism, he is less than charitable to that of others. The ecclesiastical portions of the narrative display the unmistakable bias of the extreme Presbyterian historians. Towards dissenting sects Miller, by the wayward sympathies of his near relatives, found himself forced into an attitude of tolerance ; Prelacy, on the other hand, is exposed to the

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full sweep of his scornful indignation. Undoubtedly, as other materials show, he was here guilty of an anachronism so far as the town was concerned. Cromarty was no more than the neighbouring burghs much concerned in the Covenants, though Miller is inclined to put the matter otherwise; and the Episcopal *régime* in the Highlands as a whole, was, at both stages, a much more reputable episode than he is ready to suggest. Yet, whatever be his errors of emphasis or detail when dealing with individual cases, he was too clear-seeing to miss what is not in Scotland, so far at least, a trite conclusion, "that the principles of liberty, either civil or ecclesiastical, were but little understood in Scotland in the middle of the seventeenth century; the parties which divided it deeming themselves too exclusively in the right to learn from the

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persecutions to which they were in turn subjected, that the good old rule of doing as we would be done by, should influence the conduct of politicians as certainly as that of private men." That "confession" meant vastly more for Hugh Miller in his day, than it would do for even the least independent of laymen now.

No small portion of the *Scenes and Legends* consists of local folklore, in the collection and, still more, the scientific investigation of which, Miller ranks among the pioneers. He was gathering and pondering over the fossils of the mind even before those of the buried ages of the earth. While the brothers Grimm in Germany were publishing their collections of Fairy Tales¹ and laying the foundations of modern study in that department of in-

¹ *Kinder- und Haus-Märchen* (1819).

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tellectual evidences, Hugh Miller, all unknowing, was busy at the ingathering and consideration of similar material within his own limited area. Written down between the years 1829-32, the publication of *Scenes and Legends* almost coincided with that of the second Grimm treatise, the systematising *Deutsche Mythologie*. Other contemporary gleaners were Robert Chambers with his *Traditions of Edinburgh* (1824) and Crofton Croker in Ireland (1825). None of these, however, could have directed or influenced Hugh Miller, whose work is entirely spontaneous, and attributable, as is clearly set forth in the opening chapter, to his own instinctive judgment of the value of such a record.

What he says as to the expansion of his longer tales does not seem to apply to his

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folklore material, in the handling of which, indeed, there could be but little opportunity. At the same time there is no direct evidence of adherence to the severe but absolutely desirable Grimm standard of unembellished accuracy. Probably he did no more than Croker had done, gave the material a literary dress. Where we can, by the comparative method, test his general outlines, we get no hint of distortion. Characteristic, however, are the euhemeristic setting of some of the leading legends, and the consequent hints from Miller's side of material hallucination on the part of the actors. In these cases the former feature is actually part of the tale as it reached the narrator's ears, and so verifies, once more, the contention that such tends to be attracted to the history of some real personage; in the present instances usually

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some talented story-teller whose personality became bound up with his own legend.

A case in point is that of "Willie Millar's" adventure in the "Dropping Cave" not far from the town. Within he came upon a cavern strewn with human bones "gnawed as if by cannibals," and containing a dark-coloured sarcophagus from which hung a "mace of iron" and a "bugle of gold." A blast on the latter aroused the tenant of the tomb, and brought forth an enormous hand "covered with blood" that reached towards the mace; while the throwing down of the bugle was followed by "a yell of blended grief and indignation, as the immense cover again settled over" the sleeper. The popularity of this tale among the boys of the place led the redoubtable young Hugh to explore the wonderful cave for himself; to return with the know-

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ledge that "the legend was a mere legend," and later to explain the adventure away by the contents of "the broken bottle," plus Willie's "fertile invention" as a story-teller. He could not know that the latter had but appropriated to himself a local version of the far-spread tale of the Sleeping Hero ; somewhat more crude and primitive in its details than is common ; but whether of a Celtic or Teutonic champion is, unfortunately, left undetermined. Yet let Willie invent for his youthful audience as he pleased on other lines, the adventure of the cave was always the same. Such is the tenacity of an elemental legend, and such one method, at least, of its transmission.

An even more striking variant of a famous piece of folk-literature, likewise illustrative of Miller's attitude, is Hossack's adventure in the

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fairy-haunted Burn of Eathie. He had taken up his quarters for the night in a disused mill, and having caught a wild duck roasts it for his supper. Enter the fairies on the sward, one of whom comes to Hossack's side by the fire and asks his name, which is crossly given as "Mysel' an' Mysel'"; "with a policy," Miller remarks, "similar to that resorted to by Ulysses in the cave of the giant." When the fairy scalds the mortal's cheek with the melting fat, he receives in return the half-roasted duck slap in his grinning face. In the subsequent uproar Hossack is, of course, saved by the device of the ambiguous name.

Now Mr Sidney Hartland¹ furnishes a Lapp tale which closely resembles in its leading incidents the Cromarty man's alleged adventure. In this case we have a hunter and a

¹ *Science of Fairy Tales*, pp. 173, 174.

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witch. The former losing his way enters a strange cottage, roasts some game, is approached by the witch to whom he gives his name as "Myself," and ends the colloquy by flinging "a spoonful of boiling liquid" in her face. Saved from the witch's companion by his strategic foresight, he is nevertheless sent to sleep for six months by the injured one. Here we may note that a predecessor of Hossack in the Eathie mill disappeared for seven years, the customary period of restraint in Fairyland, to which one version says he had been consigned. From these examples it is easy to see that Miller has faithfully told the tales as they were told to him. And had he not so transcribed them, by this time they had been lost for ever.

The great Celtic myths do not appear, for ethnological reasons, to have crossed the Firth,

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and what Miller knew of those circling round Fionn and his band, he got by the *ceilidh* fire in the house of a Sutherlandshire relative. With Gaelic he was unfamiliar, but enough reached him through a faithful translation to warrant the conclusion that "The pieces of fine sentiment and brilliant description discovered by Macpherson seemed never to have found their way into this northern district"—which ironic observation pretty well indicates his common-sense attitude towards the Ossianic controversy. His cousins, indeed, were firm believers in Macpherson's Gaelic versions, but Miller, well read in the dispute and of a keener literary sense, had already come to the conclusion that in his "English copy of the poems," he "had read the true Ossian in the original." Ignorant of one of the languages, and unable to judge the philological issues,

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he had yet divined the truth hid from the uncritical Celtic enthusiasts whom he loved so to tease.

But in folklore Miller was no mere collector; with his habit of mind he could never stop there. And here a most important fact must be insisted upon. It would seem natural for him to have rested in his explanations at the stage proper to the Biblical absorption of his contemporaries that, for example, "the fables of the giants of Grecian mythology" shadow forth "incidents of Mosaic history"—that mythology being the type of all such for his time. But this hypothesis he treats implicitly as inadequate. There is irony, too, in his reference in another connection to "those alchemists of mind who can transmute etymology into poetry." His own preference, however, apart from some over-

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subtle theorising of a semi-religious character, attaches to the thesis that, "man in a savage state is the same animal everywhere, and his constructive powers, whether employed in the formation of a legendary story or of a battle-axe, seem to expatiate almost everywhere in the same rugged tract of invention. For even the traditions of this first stage may be identified, like its weapons of war, all the world over." And he goes on to parallel the wild legend of the formation of Ben-Vaichard with one told by the natives regarding the formation of an island in the Tonga group.

It will thus be recognised that at this early period Miller not only discarded a Biblical theory congenial to contemporary understanding, but, further, gave distinct expression to the more modern and scientifically directed induction which followed on the

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fuller material and keener enquiry of later years. In Mr Lang's *Custom and Myth* it is expounded in what amounts to a paraphrase of what has been quoted above from *Scenes and Legends*; thus, "Now, just as the flint arrow-heads are scattered everywhere, in all the continents and isles, and everywhere are much alike, . . . so it is with the habits and legends investigated by the student of folklore" (p. 13). And the method of this school is simply to add to and carry to its logical conclusion the example cited in respect of Ben-Vaichard. Miller, too, it is worthy of note, has gone beyond the empirical generalisation to find the fundamental psychology which is its justification. Mr Lang has been at pains to give credit to early occasional anticipators of his procedure, but does not include among them the thoughtful investigator who was

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then cutting tombstones in the Cromarty churchyards.¹ The idea of savage parallelism Miller may, of course, have got from some of his eighteenth century favourites, at least so far as it affected political institutions; it may be from Voltaire. But no one with whom he can have been acquainted, had made such novel and promising use of it. In all the work Miller has done there is no part, to my mind, so remarkable a testimony to his comprehensive and penetrative qualities of mind, as that under review.

¹ See *Modern Mythology*, pp. 5, 6; Art. "Mythology," *Encycl. Brit.*, ninth edition.

CHAPTER IV

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THE moralising and didactic vein which we have noticed as overcharging the young Hugh's poetry is, though less dangerous in result, clearly traceable throughout the body of his prose. It ever leads us to the fact, which is at the heart of all his work, that Hugh Miller was a naturally religious man. His religion is no mere periodic outflow easily unguessed at in its periods of quiescence, but a pervading, glowing fire of conviction steeling his thought for every use. By training, temperament and derivation he was a Puritan of historic type,

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whose only modern representatives no longer call themselves by that name; yet clearly affirm their relationship in their moral austerity, their unsparing, impersonal devotion to a narrow if upright ideal, their sense or manner of living "as ever in the great Taskmaster's eye." Puritanism, thus conceived, when it forms the sole mental equipment, is not pleasant and rarely ennobling; where it accompanies culture and mental capacity it never fails to add strenuousness, concentration of purpose and high courage.

There was a time in his headstrong youth when Miller fancied himself treading close to Atheism—or what he held to be such—if not actually immersed therein. We must note that in his vocabulary the terms "infidel" and "atheist" are practically synonymous, and

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further equivalent to "deist." Thus Voltaire, Hume and Paine, all "deists,"¹ are indifferently classified under any one of these heads. But when Hugh conceives of himself as an atheist, with all the dreadful things which he, being the sort of man he was, might have done in that galley, it is as of one who has rejected "the Religion of the Bible" as "a cunningly-devised fable," and who was thus—so he puts it—in a position to throw off all moral restraint by setting "every action, good or bad, on the same level;" and so win peace from a tormenting conscience which was calling him to account for the unspeakable offences of Sabbath-breaking and orchard-robbery. In brief he was an atheist, or deist, or infidel, as

¹ Hume may be excepted on the score of his posthumously published *Dialogues*, which are, in trend, distinctly atheistic.

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he was a truant, out of sheer wilfulness, mere undisciplined energy. The phase was of short duration. Hugh's "atheism" was a puerile travesty.

It remains to be noted, however, that for Miller real moral goodness was inconceivable outside the pale of his theological beliefs. These, he held, formed the basis of all sound morality, and, unless so amplified, a mere "belief in the existence of God is of as little ethical value as a belief in the existence of the great sea-serpent." Some deists may indeed love virtue for its own sake, but the generality of them, he supposed, attacked dogmatic religion in order to weaken the moral sanctions. Outside the Shorter Catechism morality was in perilous case. From this frame of mind there results inevitably much uncharitableness and narrowness of moral

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judgment, examples of which will crop up from time to time.

Then we have a stage in his early twenties during which Miller was "brother in belief to a deist." He is now deeply concerned about the "strange, mysterious doctrines" of Christianity, not only "beyond the reach of reason, but directly opposed to it." Predestination coupled with free-will, and the righteousness of vicarious suffering are his stumbling-blocks—as for thoughtful, religious Scotland they still are.

Christianity for him of course means Presbyterian Calvinism. To that naturally he finally adhered; affirming Calvin to have been the only thorough reformer, inasmuch as he "alone went *sans phrase* to the Bible and to God." In the letter to Lord Brougham his declaration with reference to his relation-

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ship to the Church of Scotland is: "I never signed the Confession of her Faith, but I do more — I believe it," the antithesis being curiously suggestive of later adherences. But the special difficulties of the system Hugh never professed to have satisfactorily solved. He appears, like Kant, to have called in the "practical" reason to establish that for which the speculative reason gave no warrant. Personal circumstances, moreover, were all against his continuance in the critical frame of mind. By a pious mother and pious uncles with the blood of Donald Roy in their veins he had been raised in the nurture and admonition of Confessional doctrine. At the age of twenty a severe illness unnerved his mind, and in fear of approaching death he made vows of religious practice. As he recovered the devotion disappeared. But his

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constitutional tendency to "nervous melancholy" and depression was no doubt strengthened. How much of this may be due to the curious twist being given to the strong practical bent inherited from generations of restless seamen and mechanics, and the consequent mental unsettlement, is a nice question. Morbidity is the note of the letters which record his accession to the Christian communion, by what sort of final judgment or emotion he does not tell us. He was now twenty-five.

Miller's enquiring and rationalising mind, however, never really suffered him to rest in face of those "Janus-like" mysteries. It was even less possible that he should do so in view of his pride in his own theological skill, and his scarcely veiled, if humorous, contempt for the religious metaphysic of the

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English dissenters. As for the contemporary movement known as Puseyism — “bemused with bad metaphysics”—he treats it with open hostility, all the more keen because of its obscurantist attitude towards geology. For him it was but a feeble imitation of Popery ; and that, of course, as a superstition, obviously flourishes most at a time, then exemplified in England, when “infidelity” has created a “craving vacuum in the public mind” into which it inevitably rushes. This is a rather narrow logic by which to account for a movement which, as a reaction from religious latitudinarianism to a stricter and purer historic orthodoxy, or what was conceived as such, was indeed the English equivalent of the Evangelical movement in Scotland. Newman himself had been nursed in Evangelicalism as it existed over the

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border. The "Oxford Movement" was a religious "revival" though not of the kind Miller cared for. To Newman, again, in his abandonment, the Church of England seemed but "a mere national institution": to Miller after the Disruption (Newman left St Mary's in the same year) the Church of Scotland bore the like despised aspect, "a State institution." Nor was their logic, in a wide sense, fundamentally different: each was in search of the "historic" church.

As for the non-Calvinistic Methodists of the other part, few perhaps would care, in these more timorous times, to meet them with the theological metaphysics in which Miller with all reverence indulges. Certain of them, "wild nondescripts in their theology," resident with Miller at a Newcastle inn, were arguing that it was to limit the power of God

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to affirm that He "could not forgive without an atonement." Miller's rebuttal of this, set down with all care in his *First Impressions of England*, is that God possesses "an undervived moral nature" which constitutes "the law which controls Deity"; so that "an atonement became as essentially necessary to Him, in order that the moral nature which He did not give Himself might not be violated, as to the lapsed race." Upon which dialectic triumph one is prompted to remark that Miller might have done better to remember the warning of Hume, as he dismisses the philosophical theologising of Berkeley, that our logical line "is too short to fathom such immense abysses." Our purpose, however, has been served in exhibiting the union of reverential faith and theological rationalism upon which Miller built up the structure of

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religious beliefs which underlay every part of his thinking. It is this latter fact which makes a full comprehension of his religious metaphysic peculiarly necessary.

But it is not to be supposed that Miller reached such convictions merely along a line of ever-weakening temperamental resistance. He was familiar with some amount of sceptical literature, and must have given many a pious reader a passing shock by the aptness with which he could quote Voltaire, for example, when it suited his purpose ; or Hume so often, and so approvingly, in his historic or economic vein. He is obviously under the necessity at times of defending to more squeamish friends his rather indiscriminate choice of reading. Early in his twenties he had his attention turned to Hume whose essays he read "with admiration" ; for the time abandoning poetry

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for metaphysics. In this intellectual field, however, his lack of technical training and regular study hampers him seriously. Philosophy, too, was at the time pretty much in the background so far as Scotland was concerned ; phrenology in its earlier, cruder form, was tickling the ears of higher folk than the groundlings, and ripples occasionally on the surface of Miller's writings. Indeed, to be a believer in phrenology was, then, to be an advanced thinker. Miller's sceptical recoil came when by a leading professor of the " science " he was told that " Nature " intended him " for a musician "—him, who in his inability to distinguish tunes, had been reduced to a confession of doubt whether there was any such thing as melody at all. The revival of interest in pure philosophy was due to the genius of Hamilton, who, however, in his

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own way raised issues, not, we may be sure, pleasing to Miller. Fretfully he takes refuge in irrelevant, external tests. Metaphysic was too apt to blossom into heresy—religious heresy, that is—a mediæval objection. After all, “experiments on the properties of matter” “giving control over the elements,” are the thing as contrasted with mere observation. Test metaphysicians by their achievements in “the practical departments of thought.” Here Locke, Hume, Adam Smith had each something to show; Berkeley had nothing but his tar-water; while of the Germans, “what are their trophies in the practical?” In a narrow sense he was applying Goethe’s maxim: *Was fruchtbar ist, allein ist wahr*. (What is fruitful, alone is true.) But, on his own showing, metaphysic had its practical result in influencing the opinions and guiding the

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lives of men ; since he claimed that " All the more dangerous parties of the present day have their foundations of principle on a basis of bad metaphysic." And surely conduct is as much within the practical sphere as economics or the art of government. As a matter of fact, Miller was rather disposed, for argument's sake, to over-estimate the influence of a man's metaphysical notions upon his way of life.

At the same time his test, as he applies it, was fatal to the thinkers whom he himself favoured. What were " the trophies in the practical " of the Scottish Philosophers ? Yet that school, he believed, was destined ultimately " to give law in the region of mental philosophy " when Hume's " moonshine of sceptical speculation " had gone the way of all such illusion. To which it may be answered that

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Reid's metaphysical enthronement of "the divine inspiration of the common sense,"¹ so fitted to Miller's cast of mind, held sway within but a limited area and for a short time, while Hume's performance by giving "a completely new direction" to the speculations of Kant, through him determined the main course of subsequent European thought; and still constitutes him the one Scottish philosopher of universal significance and acquaintance.

Miller had his own way of meeting Hume's famous presentation of the argument against miracles. Campbell's reply he did not think at all satisfactory. So far as his own can be followed, it is clearly out of the centre. Take an example of its application. After a long absence cholera once more arrived on the shores

¹ Campbell Fraser's *Thomas Reid*, p. 135.

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of Northern Scotland in 1832, and in course reached Cromarty. On this Miller comments philosophically: "In the loose sense of the sophist, it was contrary to my experience that Britain should become the seat of any such fatal and widely-devastating disease as used to ravage it of old." He would be a sophist indeed, who would pin his test of credibility on anybody's individual experience. The "experience" by which the scientific structure is sustained is the experience not of one but of all, observable by anyone, and recorded and methodised by those who do observe. It says that like circumstances result in like effects, that if the circumstances of its origination were repeated, cholera was bound to occur; the "miracle" would have been if it had not occurred. Again, when he argues against the development hypothesis

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that it is condemned by the "experience" argument of Hume, since it is put forward as a "law" which must be established by evidence, of which he claims there is absolutely none, he is so far begging the question; while in the declaration that this argument "is of no value when directed against well-attested miracle" he is missing the point, which is that no such "attestation" can ever outweigh that to the contrary. In any case it is surely perfectly clear that a uniformity of "miraculous" creations in organic life is as much a natural law as any; seeing that by their very regularity and necessity the miracles have ceased to be miracles, and for that department of existence constitute a law. When finally Miller, with the Scottish School, appealed "from Hume the metaphysical dreamer" to "Hume the practical politician and shrewd

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historian," he took a road which that philosopher had already barred: "My practice, you say, refutes my doubts. But you mistake the purport of my question."

It is, indeed, abundantly clear that Miller never really understood Hume on his metaphysical side, and read him merely for refutation. Hume's analysis of the idea of Causality he seriously represents as an expansion of the "standing joke" about Tenterden Steeple and the Goodwin Sands, invented "to preserve the consistency of a foregone conclusion"; an elementary perversion which only the blinding effect of his own "foregone conclusions" could have led him to commit.

The throwing over of Hume involved, of course, similar treatment of Berkeley. The latter, indeed, had unknowingly paved the way for Hume, when he so elegantly demon-

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strated that we cannot speak of "matter" or material things except in terms which signify states of consciousness. Colour, hardness, weight, extension, with the other qualities which go to make up a material thing, are all relative to an understanding mind; any external object is composed of such qualities or properties and nothing more, and each of them implies a perceiving mind for which it has meaning. The whole dispute is over the philosophic significance of such words as "matter" and "existence"; what we *mean* by the "existence" of a "material world," and not whether it does exist or not. Hence Miller is beside the mark in supposing that Berkeley's exposition carries with it the corollary that no world really existed during the geological epochs, and "that not until comparatively yesterday did its rational exist-

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ence come into being." To which roughly expressed and erroneous deduction, along with its companion conundrums, Berkeley had by anticipation answered "that by the principles premised we are not deprived of any one thing in nature. Whatever we see, feel, hear, or *anywise conceive or understand*, remains as secure as ever, and is as real as ever." Metaphysical construction is an analysis of experience, not a substitute therefor. On the other hand, a follower of Berkeley might invite Miller to explain what he meant by "rational existence" apart from reason or a perceiving intelligence of some sort. It is somewhat bewildering to reflect that the good Bishop in his philosophical counter-blast was combating the views of the Deists as stoutly and with as much grace of style as Miller himself; albeit with more subtlety and per-

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manence of argument. There is a curious irony, too, in the fact that the gentleman (Prof. Campbell Fraser) whom Miller welcomed to the Chair of Metaphysics at Edinburgh as the champion of the Scottish School has, from that position, done more for Berkeley than any man of his generation.

What we must finally realise is that Miller's conception of things is utterly inconsistent with the results worked out by Berkeley and Hume, so that it is imperative that the contributions of these philosophers be countered and discredited. To him the distinction between matter and mind is absolute ; while the " fundamental error " which mars Locke's great work is the postulate that all knowledge comes from " experience," in addition to which Miller recognised some sort of innate or intuitive knowledge not so to be accounted

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for. We are thus placed at the departmental view of the universe. Matter, he implicitly assumes, is just that form of "inert, senseless" substance, deprived of all intelligible qualities, to which Berkeley denied "existence." This was partly the blunt retort of the practical man of science; partly the "Scottish Philosophy" at its crudest.¹ Graven on the given material are to be found the evidences of intelligent manipulation, which point straight from nature to nature's designer or God. For just as in the moral sphere the Deity is conceived as pre-eminently judicial, humanised even to the extent of administering an independently existing law; so, in the intellectual, he is the *demiourgos*, the fashioner of an independently existing world-stuff. "What I had been slowly deciphering," he

¹ See Seth's *Scottish Philosophy*, p. 75.

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says of the fossils, "were the *ideas* of God as developed in the mechanism and framework of His creatures." And from "the *human* cast and character of the contrivances" thus exemplified—an analogy which he brings up in a fresh form at every turn—he deduces the virtual identity in nature of the Divine and human mind. Thus we have on another proof of the Pentateuchal affirmation, that "God made man after His own image." It is just as easy to show that we are proving the reverse process. Whence came the refractory material so handled that "There is scarcely an architectural ornament of the Gothic or Grecian styles which may not be found existing as fossils in the rocks," is as greatly dark as whence came the unrelenting Justice so greedy of satisfaction. Miller, in fact, is but standing on the old paths of Natural Theology. His

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aim is to supplement Paley's popular work by writing an up-to-date geological chapter. He warns the Church that the conflict with unbelief is passing from the field of metaphysics to that of science, and that she must put on the whole armour of geology for her defence. Further, he predicts that "the Butlers and Chalmerses of the future will be content to recognise the geologic field as that of their richest and most pregnant analogies." All this gives point to Spencer's estimate that Hugh Miller "might be aptly described as a theologian studying geology." As Chalmers had claimed astronomy for Christianity, he, Miller, would do likewise with Geology. To polemic on these lines he devoted the greater part of his energy, arguing and expounding with much ingenuity and wealth of illustra-

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tion. In simple, traditional fashion he spells out "design" where the more cautious, modern naturalist can confess but to "adaptation"; traces the pervading presence of Divine mind throughout the workings of the world, where the human mind in its conceptions of these workings—which is science—is but finding itself; and his product shares the inevitable fate of all natural theologies which profess to find the "interjected finger" of Deity in certain phenomena and not in others, in "eagle's wing or insect's eye"; at one place and not at another; seeing God in the marvellous and beneficent only and not as much also in the commonplace and the evil.¹

¹ In this form, of course, the teleological argument for a "Designer" has been abandoned. It is now based, not on

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particular instances, but on the evolutionary process as a whole ; not on “capricious interference” or “miracle” but on regular method—in fact on the very lines against which Miller so strenuously argued. (Cf. Knight's *Aspects of Theism*, chap. v.; Campbell Fraser's *Philosophy of Theism*, 2nd edition, p. 218.)

CHAPTER V

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FOR fifteen years Hugh Miller worked as a stone-mason in all the various branches of his craft. It was an experience, perhaps, not without its lessons; but against these must be set the fact that it nearly killed him, left him constitutionally delicate and subject to attacks of “nervous melancholy,” and, from its “excessive toil,” started those “fits of partial somnambulism” which were later to recur with fatal effect. He was supporting himself mainly by cutting inscriptions on grave-stones, even as his mother had done by sewing grave clothes, when in 1834 he was appointed to the

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incongruous position of bank accountant ; in which position he, for a time, from his want of facility in acquiring the mechanical part of the business, figured as “the Incompetent.” On the strength of the poems, the letters on the herring fishing in the Moray Firth, and minor efforts in a politico-ecclesiastical direction, he had become the literary lion of the place ; and went the round of high-class tea-parties in a leonine, independent fashion. Then came the creditable example of literary patronage noted above. Despite his mechanic occupation, Hugh was neither boor nor bohemian, but an admirer and cultivator of the “respectable” in style and opinion ; only not from any servile impulses. “I do not think I could be happy without being independent” is his confession ; and if he did not fling away Miss Dunbar’s silver watch, as Johnson did the pair of shoes

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charitably left at his room door in Oxford, she had enough trouble to get him to accept it. He never forgot he was first a stone-mason, and he never overlooked a friend whom he had made as such. Ready generosity to friends and acquaintances became, later, almost a weakness. But with his thoroughly conventional opinions and outlook on life he was no dangerous prodigy, no upheaver of things constituted, and so burghal society took him to its heart. He married, as the saying is, "above him," and the absorption became complete. The rebellious spirit of his early years which had found vent in the expression, "my prevailing disposition is evil," the grinding discipline of drudgery had worn smooth.

Intellectually, too, a change had occurred. He was now the zealous devotee of science. For years back he had been working out the

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local geology and collecting the abundant fossils of the district. Under what conditions is amusingly hinted in his first letter to Agassiz, dated 30th May, 1838: "I am much alone in this remote corner—a kind of Robinson Crusoe in geology—and somewhat in danger of the savages who cannot be made to understand why, according to Job, a man should be 'making leagues with the stones of the field.'"¹

At first, groping in the dark, he had classified his specimens by distinguishing figures. Then some light began to reach him through popular publications, but little bearing on his particular labours till *Scenes and Legends* (1835) led to Cromarty a gentleman who brought his specimens under the notice of Agassiz and Murchison. After that it was plain sailing. Miller got into communication with the latter,

¹ *Life of Agassiz*, Jules Marcou, i., 226.

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born in "the same nook of land," and on his advice embodied the fruits of his "patient research" in a monograph on "The Old Red Sandstone" (1841). A species of the particular genus which he had discovered was, by Agassiz, named after him, *Pterichthys Milleri* (i.e., "the winged fish of Miller.")

Geology was a field which in many ways just suited Miller. He had ever an insistent consciousness of his own mental powers. But he was not in the least inclined to devote these to professional specialisation. He "chose rather to exercise the faculties proper to be employed in it, in the wide field of nature and human affairs." Moreover, in other branches of study a long, beaten track lay before him ere he could reach the "undiscovered, untrodden regions in which it would be a delight to expatiate." He believed

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with Hazlitt that, "There is no place for genius but in the indefinite and unknown." Thus till he was past twenty-six his studies and hopes were in the main literary, and, after a fashion, philosophic. Then it seems to have dawned upon him that his knowledge of natural history might be turned to account in both ways. He had no strictly scientific equipment, but he had learned to observe and "was always investigating," as is very obvious from passages in *Schools and Schoolmasters*. "Ever since I recollect myself," he writes elsewhere, "I had a turn for the study of natural history." And the example and teaching of his Uncle Sandy, who could stop under a heavy fire, on an Egyptian beach, to put a curious shell in his pocket, and in whose instructive company—the day's work done—he used to ramble over the Cromarty

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beach at low tide, must certainly not be forgotten.

It is of the first importance then to remember that Miller approached geology through this wider gate. Practical natural studies gave him the preparation which other men received on academic lines. Thus for him geology was ever, "natural history extended over all ages." And from this natural history he would not eliminate mankind, including primarily "the study of that most important of all the branches of philosophy—the philosophy of one's own life." Then, to complete the process, like Earle's *Contemplative Man*, "he knits his observations together, and makes a ladder of them all to climb to God." So it is we find, that, while he was ever a devoted and enthusiastic geologist, even his scientific writings do not

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confine themselves purely to their own subject, but point round the whole compass of human interests.

Happily for Miller's ambition there was little as yet in geology of that "beaten track" which he dreaded as a laborious obscurity. It was, indeed, a science in its infancy. Strictly speaking, we may say it had been born in the same year as Miller himself, in Playfair's *Illustrations of the Huttonian Theory* (1802). Its "field was still in a sense newly discovered, it stretched over a wide area, and lay open to any one who with active feet, good eyes, and shrewd head chose to enter it." (Geikie's *Life of Murchison*, i. 112.) It happened, too, that Miller's particular researches were being carried out in a formation which was, at the time, a subject of much dispute.

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That a mainly sandstone series, distinguished from its position as "Old," and from its prevailing colour as "Red," extended over a considerable part of England and well into Scotland was a matter of early knowledge. But of its dimensions and its importance little was known. Conybeare and Phillips in their work on the Geology of England (1822) had grouped the Old Red with the Carboniferous series, which it underlay. Six years later, Sedgwick and Murchison dealt with the Scottish Old Red in a joint memoir, in which they described its great extent and thickness, its lithological characteristics, and, above all, certain peculiar fossil fishes found in the Caithness beds. Continued investigation along the Welsh border, where the Old Red attains an enormous depth, and the discovery in England of fishes of similar species to those

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in Scotland, so impressed Murchison with its importance that in his great work, *The Silurian System* (1839) he proposed that the Old Red Sandstone should be recognised as a distinct system. Three years earlier he had, along with Sedgwick, indicated its connection with the Devonian system, in which it is now merged as a lake formation. Miller, to the end, however, following Murchison, held it to be “exclusively an ocean deposit.”

Meantime the Continental geologists were protesting loudly against Murchison's proposal. The Old Red, they maintained, was a merely local production, utterly unworthy to rank as a system. The dispute was in full swing when Miller, in the way we have already indicated, placed before the scientific world a quite startling amount of evidence as to the richness of fossil remains in the despised

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formation. Moreover the charm and varied interest of the book carried it outside the purely scientific circle to the hands of the general reader. Miller's success was immediate; a new stimulus was added to investigation, of which not the least important was the share done by Robert Dick, the Thurso baker and scientific worker, who unselfishly placed his discoveries entirely at Miller's disposal.

But though Miller had thus the advantage of a pioneer, he has also had to suffer the inevitable losses. For much of his work he has himself written the epitaph: "Such is the state of progression in geological science, that the geologist who stands still for but a very little must be content to find himself left behind." Palæontology, or the study of archaic forms of life preserved as fossils, has since his time been revolutionised, and that,

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too, by the application of a principle which Miller never lost an opportunity of deriding. As may be surmised, he was not technically equipped for dealing with its data either as zoologist or botanist. This was, however, a deficiency shared in by a good many English geologists, to whom, following in the steps of "Strata Smith" and devoting themselves mainly to tracing out the chronological sequence of strata, fossil remains were valuable but as a means of identification. Nevertheless it is Huxley's testimony : "The more I study the fishes of the "Old Red" the more I am struck with the patience and sagacity manifested in Hugh Miller's researches, and by the natural insight which in his case seems to have supplied the place of special anatomical knowledge."¹ This was a natural tribute from

¹ Cited in Art. "Hugh Miller," *Dict. Nat. Biog.*

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Huxley, of whose method—that of Pander also and now of all palæontologists—of paying careful attention to structural details, and not occupying oneself entirely with external shape and form of teeth and scales, Miller was an anticipator. Those need be less surprised who are familiar with his practical training in natural observation, and his readiness to study such sections of anatomy as were possible to him, whether in a cleaned pig, or a stranded cuttle-fish dissected by himself. Thus it came about that he sometimes displayed more insight in his restorations than Agassiz himself; as is shown by the way in which the latter, under protest from Miller, reversed and displaced from their true position the plates of *Pterichthys*.¹ Abstracted from other engrossing interests, Miller, there

¹ *Testimony of the Rocks*, p. 212.

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is full reason to believe, might have developed into one of the very greatest of ichthyologists.

In structural geology, again, he had no proper training, so that Sir Archibald Geikie, the man who, Miller thought, "would most probably be his successor as an exponent of Scottish geology,"¹ will scarcely allow him even "elementary knowledge"² of stratigraphy. The test is Miller's views upon that knotty problem, the structure of the N.W. Highlands. Miller knew the district well, yet to his last days believed it to be bordered by part of a "frame" of Old Red Sandstone. Sandstone of course there is, lying even as does the sandstone of the East Coast, unconformably upon an old gneiss. He knew, too, that it passed under quartz rock,

¹ *Sketch Book of Popular Geology*, Pref. xxxii.

² Leask's *Hugh Miller*, p. 147.

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which, in turn, was overlaid by limestones, with a younger gneiss, as was then supposed, over all. From the equivalence in number of formations and the analogical positions, Miller summarily concluded that the Western series was but the Eastern one highly metamorphosed. The fossil organisms alleged to have been discovered by M'Culloch and Cunningham in the overlying quartz, Miller would not admit as such. And if he was wrong in holding the sandstones to be of identical origin, well, so were Lyell and Murchison, and the majority of geologists. Miller, too, hedged so far as to declare that his conclusion was "merely a strong probability." Mr Peach settled the matter by the discovery of Silurian fossils in the Durness limestone (1854), which, of course, proved that the underlying formation could not be

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the Old Red whose normal place is above. But even after Murchison and the rest had abandoned the old position Hugh seems to have stuck to his “metamorphism.” The last record on the subject leaves him still there. (*Old Red Sandstone*, seventh edition, p. 344.)

It is with the Old Red Sandstone that Miller's name is indissolubly connected. His delightful monograph is still fresh and stimulating, and in parts unpassed. Wherever English geology is known, the “Old Red” has for its students a peculiar nearness to their sympathies. Why is this? Splendid as Miller's work was, he was not alone in the field. He was not its discoverer. It is because the history of the Old Red Sandstone is woven into the romantic and noble history of his own life; because round its hills and shores hangs the poetic glamour

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of his charming descriptions and brilliant imagining.

There is another department in which Miller may claim to have done original work, that occupied by our youngest and still obscure geological deposit, the Boulder Clay. In characteristic fashion he has left us vivid descriptions both of the deposit as it affects the landscape—as on the shore of his native firth—and of the conditions under which he judged it was laid down. The scratched pebbles and boulders with which it is associated, and the smoothed and striated rock surfaces which it overlies, point unmistakably to the action of ice. But in what form? The British geologists generally, including Miller, imagined the action of icebergs and ice-floes sufficient to account for the phenomena. As the ice-markings reached the tops of lofty

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mountains, it had to be further postulated that the land was at the time in a condition of submergence, over which, borne by a strong western flow, drifted "the ocean-borne ice-bergal cars of winter," rutting the rock pavements, dropping their imposed boulders, and leaving the dressings of scraped rock to be carried on and laid down by the currents. Agassiz, on coming to Scotland in 1840 fresh from his study of the Alpine glaciers, discovered similar phenomena to those he had been investigating there, all through the Highland glens. The British geologists, quite unfamiliar with the operations of land ice, at first scouted the obvious inference. Murchison, at the British Association meeting of that year, "spoke against the general application of the theory," and surmised, "that the dispute would end in having a compromise

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between himself (Agassiz) and us of the floating icebergs.”¹ Miller was, of course, on the side of the icebergs, of which he makes such dramatic use in the *Sketch Book*. But the mass of evidence converted others to the idea that the Scottish valleys, too, once had their glaciers. Miller grudgingly acquiesced. The further hypothesis, however, which alone could account for the impressive phenomena of rounded and smoothed hummocks of hard rock, valleys regularly grooved their whole length, and mountains to their crests, with their naturally rough and jagged masses planed down to gracefully undulating eminences—that the one possible agency for results on such a scale was land-ice in the form of a superincumbent and slowly but irresistibly moving ice-cap, took nearly a quarter of a

¹ Geikie's *Life of Murchison*, ii. 307.

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century to adapt itself to the minds of the majority of our insular geologists. This demonstration was, in the main, the work of Sir Andrew Ramsay who brilliantly developed the ideas of Charpentier and Agassiz. The “drift” theory died hard—nor is it yet without its advocates, in Britain at least—and the general conversion came only long after Miller was dead.

He was, in fact, normally as conservative in his geological preferences as in all others. He was not likely to accept the novel but strictly scientific reasoning of Lyell in his epochal *Principles of Geology* (3 vols., 1830-33), that the geological phenomena of the past are to be interpreted in terms of the same operating agencies — atmospheric, chemical, and, above all, fluvial—as are producing the phenomena of the present. But the school to

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which Miller adhered, while not denying denudation to some extent, and admitting the enormous lapses of time suggested by the geological changes, could conceive of these only as the effects of convulsive subterranean movements and upheavals, sudden expulsions and withdrawals, with all nature groaning and travailing at the birth of a new era. Thus the mountain structure of the Highlands would be easily and dramatically accounted for as the result of successive "paroxysms of upheaval," which operated nearly at right angles to each other. The country was "first ploughed across and fretted into deep furrows and steep, mountainous ridges, and then, in an after period, ploughed diagonally, so as partially to efface the former ploughing." The relative times of these ploughings by paroxysm are fixed by the formations which

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their "monstrous children" bore up with them. The hills of "the diagonal Ben Nevis line," as flanked by the Oolite, are the younger: those of "the transverse Ben Wyvis" line as having dislodged the overlying Old Red, the older. Now, all this is neither necessary nor demonstrable. To say that the earth's surface has been subjected to secular sinkings, elevations and distortions is one thing¹: to account for its present scenic features by such agencies is quite another. The tools that have graven these are the tools still in everyday use. And

¹ According to Prof. Suess in his monumental work, *The Face of the Earth*, the main agency in the formation of masses of dry land and mountain chains, has been the withdrawal of the ocean into basins resulting on radial contraction, and the consequent drying of large areas, locally subjected also to lateral pressure. This conception would have provided Miller with another *datum* of identification with the procedure outlined in the first chapter of Genesis.

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nothing is more certain than that the grooved and pitted surface of Northern Scotland owes nothing to these Titanic throes. There denudation and not elevation has been the formative cause. But the idea is all of a piece with Miller's general conception of Nature as catastrophic in its processes, breaking forth from time to time in diluvian destructions and seismic upbuildings. Murchison, it is to be noticed, fought, as against Lyell, for this hypothesis till the close of his life. There is in Miller's case a special reason for acceptance of the older view. There is the analogy with the Mosiac account of the earth's making to be maintained. "In both records—the sculptured and the written—periods of creative energy are indicated as alternating with periods of rest—*days* in which the Creator laboured, with *nights* in

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which He ceased from His labours, again to resume them in the morning." All through the balance of scientific judgment is thus theologically weighted.

Beyond his original work of observation and discovery must be reckoned the place which he won for his science in the interest of the general. For this mission he had special qualifications. He thoroughly mastered his information, pressed it—certainly not always quite legitimately—into the service of broader human interests, and set down the complex in vivid, persuasive fashion. He proffered no mere manual or dry-as-dust digest. On the gross darkness and chaos of entombed eras, he turned the light of his knowledge and, still more brilliantly, that of his poetic imagination. He was a "maker" in geology; a reconstructor in his own

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melodious and strikingly suggestive language of ideal geologic landscapes. "Geology of all the sciences," he writes, "addresses itself most powerfully to the imagination." In another place: "much of the interest of a science such as geology must consist in the ability of making dead deposits represent living scenes." There are, of course, obvious dangers in such a course of treatment: he was apt to reconstruct from very slight materials. "The gigantic Scur of Eigg," he says dramatically, "rests on the remains of a prostrate forest" (*Cruise of the Betsy*). The evidence for this forest was but a piece or two of driftwood dug from the old river bed upon which really rests the mass of pitchstone constituting the Scur. Something of this sort, no doubt, was in Dick's mind when he declared that, "Hugh Miller was a splendid

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writer, but he was so highly imaginative as to be rather unsafe to rely upon." Nevertheless his pictures stirred the imaginations of his general readers, naturally more ready to respond to such a stimulus than to an appeal merely to their faculties of scientific and abstract reasoning. Service of this sort is as rare as it is valuable, and there must have been many on both sides of the Atlantic—for Miller had a large audience in America—who owed their first acquaintance with, and continued interest in geology to its attractive presentation at the hands of the erstwhile stone-mason.

CHAPTER VI

GEOLOGY—RECONCILIATIONS

BUT this very proximity and access to the public ear inevitably set up certain reactions which were bound to give a man, so sensitively earnest as Miller, a large amount of uneasiness and pain. The ruling influences of his mind were Religion and Science, and, at a time when these were viewed as heralds of opposite destinies, his position was a tragically uncertain one. Serving both, it seemed to him that those unable to conceive of such service must suffer from defective or distorted knowledge of one or the other. Obviously then, it was his part to play at

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once the missionary and the mediator. So for his scientific readers he interpreted the facts of his own science in terms of Calvinistic theology; to his religious readers he offered scientific verities as an arsenal, whence to draw weapons of the newest type for the defence of their common faith. On neither side was the result convincing, and posterity has revolted from his sermons in stones.

Very early in his inquiries, two facts, then startlingly novel, forced themselves upon Miller's mind. One was that, far from being confined within six days, the processes of "creation" had extended over an inconceivable passage of time; and the other that Death had ridden his pale horse over myriads of living generations ere Adam crumbled to his genital earth. The first loosened the prevailing chronologies based on the Mosaic

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account, while, more seriously, branding that account, to all seeming, as false; the other struck at a dogma believed to be of structural importance to the orthodox belief. There was, further, his rationalising treatment of the Noachian Deluge which he represented as "a flood restricted and partial." Here Miller was even less "orthodox" than many of the English geologists, such as Greenough or Sedgwick, for whom the Flood was the latest of the great world-catastrophes of Cuvier. For him, on the other hand, expressions seeming to express universality are, in the frequent way of scripture, really metonymies—that is "a part . . . is described as the whole." In all this, of course, there was nothing really new; only such deductions had hitherto been confined to professed enemies of Christianity, and Miller, with his gift of popular appeal

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and pious reputation, first impressed them seriously upon the mass of religious people. The emancipated of to-day may perhaps find it difficult to realise the genuine pain and alarm which they occasioned ; the bitterness of the retorts is our witness. In his own day he was regarded by the extreme men on both sides as a bit of a traitor, and from both sides he was peculiarly assailable.

“ For the last fourteen years,” he writes in the work upon which he was engaged at his death, “ I have submitted ” to the assaults of a particular class of writers “ without provocation and without reply.” Thus he takes up the cudgels against the Anti-geologists, the men who could declare that, “ geology had the devil for its author,” that it was made up of “ horrid blasphemies ” ; and that they had to struggle against “ the immense

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mischief occasioned by the infidel works of geologists, especially among the lower classes." Most of this sort of thing came from clergymen. Miller took it all seriously to heart, and laboured through many pages of forcible disputation to expose such "follies." There is, however, an ironic justice in the fact that he himself was being assailed by the more backward with precisely the same set of epithets he had already made copious use of against men relatively more advanced.

Nor can it be overlooked that there was much excuse for the attitude of his opponents. These saw that Miller went, what was to them, far in his disproof of the literal accuracy of the Bible. There he would himself stop, but how many would choose to stop with him? What guarantee had they that, as his geological studies progressed, he

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too would not be forced to surrender more positions to the enemy? The fact was that the unread and unstudious, orthodox people up and down Scotland, even when friendly to Miller, were ever in a state of dread anticipation as to what new heresy might burst from his pen. Consider what it must have meant in those slavish days to have it avowed as a working principle, "that those who have perilously held that along with the moral facts (of the Bible) definite physical facts, geographic, geologic, or astronomical, had also been imparted, have almost invariably found themselves involved in monstrous error." It was little to simple believers in the six-days Creation, Biblical chronology, a universal flood, and an all-containing Ark, that he made up for destroying these by combating the more novel heresy of other

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men; that might be left to die the death; but it looked too much as if Miller, with his fancy writing, were setting himself up to be a new and better equipped Moses.

A few years after his death a volume appeared specifically directed against himself as the "first geologist to lead off in an open and avowed attempt to eliminate portions of the Bible, and to substitute therefor his geologic version of the *Footprints of the Creator*." (*Answer to Hugh Miller and Theoretic Geologists*, by Thomas A. Davies, New York, 1860.) The interest of his life-story and "the sweet music of his style," are declared to be but lures towards the adoration of "the geologists' infidel fossil God." It was his science that led him astray, for, it is sadly confessed, he "was a devout Christian before geology made its deep mark upon him."

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Thereafter, if consistent, he was no longer a "Biblical Christian." "Beyond question," however, he was "an out-and-out geologist . . . excited to a pitch almost bordering on frenzy,"¹ who "contrived to sprinkle into his writings, so artistically and skilfully, just enough of Christian soothing reconciliation to entrap and ensnare" his readers. For his science, his geology and his "anti-biblical theology" there is nothing but the uplifted hands of interjections and marks of exclamation. Wherefore, proclaims the author, "It should . . . be the duty of every Christian pen to denounce, in unmeasured terms, his attacks upon the Bible, and his frenzied

¹ This seems to have been a favourite charge. Cp. "Many parts of Mr Miller's book (*Testimony of the Rocks*), it is probable, must have been written under great mental excitement." *The Beacon of the Rocks, Erected against Miller's Theory of Creation*, p. 10 (1858).

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attempt to blast the truth of the Mosaic narrative of creation."

Those who are ready to reflect upon Miller for his backwardness, as measured by modern standards, should strive to reconstruct the mental landscape of which he was part, as sketched in utterances such as these. So placed, our judgment, even if no more than just, must view him in a more acceptable and sympathetic light.

Nearer home, too, there were misunderstandings, oppositions and painfully strained relations springing from the same root. It could hardly be expected that the Presbyterian clergy would regard Miller's geologising with indifference. Robert Dick, himself pestered but callous, writes Miller as follows: "I see that you are not in heaven as to peace any more than I am. Yet I candidly

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say that it is very hard that you cannot enjoy yourself for one day among the rocks, without being assailed for it by ignorant W. W.'s (? Worldly-Wisemen) be they clerical or not. Great stir about tyrannical Popery at present ; but query—may there not be among ourselves Moderate Popes, Free Popes, and such like ? Plenty, I guess." Dick was under boycott, and flooded with tracts about the state of his soul. He struggled on against the former ; the tracts he stuffed into his oven.

Miller, too, met it all bravely enough. There were the facts not to be gainsaid, and, "Preconceived opinion . . . must yield ultimately to scientific truth." The stock argument of his opponents was that God had created the fossilised creatures *as* fossils, just as He had created the living ones as living ; and

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that it was a sacrilegious attempt to limit His power to pretend that He could not have done so. To which Miller crushingly answers: "It would manifest but little reverence for His character to compliment His infinite power at the expense of His infinite wisdom."

At the same time there is more than a suspicion that, in his eagerness to indemnify himself, he was too ready, when at all possible, to adapt his scientific knowledge to the prejudices of the multitude, especially when these happened to jump with his own. Dick certainly thought that in his books he had always one eye on the facts and the other on the rigidly religious, and indeed expostulated with Miller to that effect. He even traced the beginning of his mental collapse to the overstimulation of his brain in seeking

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out a line of least resistance between the two.

A position of this sort seemed to be afforded by the Mosaic description of the Creation. We need not enter into any examination of Miller's *a priori* views as to the limits of the "Discoverable and the Revealed"; or how the line is drawn in the Hebrew Scriptures "with exquisite precision" between "what man can of himself discover and what he cannot," inasmuch as God had revealed the morally valuable facts such as, for example, "the authorship of the Heavens and earth," otherwise undiscoverable, leaving the scientific detail to be educed by "the unassisted human intellect." This form of prelection either assumes the whole question at issue, or affects an intimacy with the purposes of the Divine mind scarcely consonant with the attitude of

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perhaps a faithless but essentially more humble-minded generation.

What we are being led up to is an elaborate effort to reconcile the facts of science with the "Mosaic geology." This Miller holds to be an absolutely necessary and inevitable exercise since "the grounds of the Mosaic record are those on which the other Scriptures rest," a most incautious surrender; while "at least some of its objects" are, "to establish the all-important fact of the Divine authorship of the universe," a narrow and perilous establishment; and "to furnish a basis and precedent in the Divine example for the institution of Sabbath"; although the "Christian Sabbath," which is what Miller means, is built upon quite another foundation, and is really the supplanter of the "seventh day" of Creation.

Reconciliation, then, is effected thus. The

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“days” of the Mosaic account are “prophetic days,” actually “lengthened periods” of “great extent.” What Moses has optically described was to him “visionally” revealed,¹ so that in using the term “days” he was really labouring under an optical delusion. The word marks merely “openings and droppings of the curtain” on the “panorama of creation”—Miller’s conception of “nature” was always dramatic and abrupt—though perhaps further symbolising—again a favourite application—the waxing and waning of dominant forms of organic life. Should philologists raise objection to this treatment of language, then he “would in any such case, at once, and without hesitation, cut the philological knot, by determining that that

¹ Miller seems to have had the hint as to this from Coleridge. (*Testimony of the Rocks*, p. 195.)

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philology cannot be sound which would commit the Scriptures to a science that cannot be true"; thus bringing himself face to face with his own dictum: "No scientific question was ever yet settled dogmatically, or ever will" be.

Having thus, nevertheless, "dogmatically settled" the significance of the "days," he goes on to re-write the Mosaic narrative in terms of its geological equivalents: "It was, let us suppose, a diorama, over whose shifting pictures the curtain rose and fell six times in succession — once during the Azoic period, once during the earlier and middle Palæozoic period, once during the Carboniferous period, once during the Permian or Triassic period, once during the Oolitic or Cretaceous period, and, finally, once during the Tertiary period." Minor objections crop up at every stage, but one would seem to be fatal. While land

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animals are in the Biblical narrative not supposed to have stepped on to the stage of Creation till the sixth day, here represented by the "Tertiary period," the remains of the earliest land mammal appear as far back as the very "Triassic period," which, in Miller's chronology, represents the fourth day. This point, however, at once made against him from both sides, has no vital bearing upon Miller's scheme, which makes no attempt to formulate precise, sequent correspondences. The "geologic" days are but "air drawn panoramas," representing "salient" features or predominant forms of life ; without prejudice to the existence of others on an inferior scale. What is shown is only what would strike the eye, not what would fully indicate the actual position of affairs. It is assumed, of course, that our knowledge is sufficient to warrant us

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in predicating how the earth would, at certain epochs, really appear to an observer. Only Miller's prestige, argumentative weight and ability of imaginative expression could invest with plausibility so violent a handling of a plain, matter-of-fact narrative.

The cardinal misconception remains to be considered. It is of wider importance than its bearing upon the special case in hand. Miller and no small number of the contemporary geologists wrote and reasoned as if the geological formations extended, each at one and the same time, over the whole surface of the globe. Thus all over the earth the conditions of Carboniferous life prevailed, when presto! a "sudden change," and the scene everywhere shifts simultaneously to those of Permian characteristics. No assumption could be more unwarrantable. On the

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earth, as we now know it, every type of sedimentary rock is being laid down at the same time, each with its own characteristic forms of contemporary life ; while zones of fauna and flora, covering the whole range of known existence, traverse its surface horizontally and vertically. Differences of climate, differences of physical habitat and surroundings, imply differences in forms of life. Changes there are, but they are gradual and local, and the whole web of life is inextricably and heterogeneously woven together. Why are we to assume, without reasons assigned, that totally different circumstances hitherto prevailed ; that the earth passed to the present through simple homogeneous stages, during which its physical contours and climate were everywhere the same, and its flora and fauna exactly similar the wide world over ? On examination,

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such a position is seen to be utterly untenable. Yet something of the sort is implied in all Miller's geological reasoning, and, apart from Lyell and his followers, in more than his. But, unless certain geological phenomena can be shown to be everywhere contemporaneous, what becomes of the equating of geological periods with Mosaic days? Spencer and Huxley may have pushed the counter-argument too far in claiming the possible co-existence in different quarters of the globe of diverse geological systems. However that may be, it is certain that no place exists for the hypothesis that each stage of the geological record was sharply isolated in time; that its characteristics were world-wide and contemporaneous; and that the great changes in flora and fauna were brought about by "sudden" extinction and "sudden" creation.

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On these terms Miller could speak in picturesque phrase of "platforms of death" and of "another and superior order of existence" springing "into being at the fiat of the Creator." Such conceptions were peculiarly acceptable to the minds of even the greater English geologists.¹ And so "periodic fixity" in stratigraphy, and "fixity of species" in palæontology, are the pillars of Miller's "reconciliations"; and with their collapse the "baseless fabric" of his "visions" dissolves from a Biblical-scientific construction into its purely literary elements.

But Miller's hasty running of geological data into theological moulds did not stop there. He is ever on the outlook for "types and symbols," allegories and mystic analogies.

¹ Cp. Von Zittel's *History of Geology and Palæontology*, p. 140, *et seq.*

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He would resolve the anatomical idealism of Owen, and the metaphysical verbalism of Agassiz—of which we shall have further occasion to speak—into “one great general truth, viz.: that the Palæozoic and Secondary dispensations of Creation were charged, like the Patriarchal and Mosaic dispensations of grace, with the shadow of better things to come.” In particular he had a theory that in all forms of organic life the earliest examples were the noblest, and that, thereafter, there is steady degradation of the type, so that there is not one of the great divisions of animate existence “in which, in at least some prominent feature, the present, through this mysterious element of degradation, is not inferior to the past.” Thus is worked out one of those “geologic prophecies” in which Agassiz in his own field was so fertile. For

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the process foreshadows the fall of man from his original perfection, as well as the still earlier lapse of the "angels that kept not their first estate." Discussion of such misplaced ingenuity is needless. It has contributed nothing to either science or theology and is as much out of harmony with the most developed conceptions of both as the bestiaries of the Middle Ages. The practice was no doubt, in large part, the outcome of the influence of Mr Stewart of Cromarty, a clergyman famous for his symbolical theology. In part, too, it may have been due to acquaintance with certain contemporary writings of young Ruskin, with whom he has so much in common. Miller finding "the principle of Cromwell's fluted pot"—a helmet—in the scales of *Holoptychius*, and drawing argument from "the human cast of the contrivance,"

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curiously resembles Ruskin discovering the Greek fret in the crystals of bismuth, and buttressing his condemnation of it as a decorative form by the fact that naturally they never occur in perfection, but can be thus produced only by artificial means. (*Seven Lamps*, chap. iv. sec. 4.) In fact, Miller's general attitude to Science was like that of his great contemporary to Art—instinctively ethical or humanistic. His temper was no more fundamentally scientific than that of Ruskin was fundamentally artistic. Hence in so many passages he appears as a “prophecy” to use a term of his own—of that great verbal pictorialist.

It was upon such “symbolic” or reconciliatory work that Miller was engaged at the time of his death (*Testimony of the Rocks*, 1857); and the mental strain on a man between two fires contributed in its measure

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to the final collapse. Yet, positive results there were : first, he did, by his example and defence, make things socially easier for his brother geologists, and encourage timorous, youthful spirits in geological study ; and, second, he was able to embody, amid much archaic disputation, passages like *The Mosaic Vision of Creation*, that have an independent and abiding literary interest. There was no flagging in that industrious brain, even when it tottered on the edge of the abyss.

CHAPTER VII

GEOLOGY—THE DEVELOPMENT HYPOTHESIS

BETWEEN the scientific work of the earlier and that of the latter half of the nineteenth century a great gulf is fixed, over which but little, and that only of the very first quality, has been able to cross. Agassiz was the leading embryologist of the day, and in 1859 his great *Essay on Classification* appeared simultaneously with Darwin's *Origin of Species*. The result is that for the modern naturalist Agassiz's work is practically unreadable, the acceptance of the Development Hypothesis having shifted the point of view so uncompromisingly. What, then, is to be

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expected for Miller, who devoted himself energetically and unsparingly to opposing and ridiculing that very conception, so that Agassiz could commend him as having, "with an ingenuity and patience worthy of a better subject, stripped it even of its semblance of truth."¹

This, ludicrous as it may now seem, is simply to say that Miller played a great part in securing that, on the very eve of the publication of the *Origin of Species* (in Huxley's words) "the position of the supporters of the special Creation theory seemed more impregnable than ever, if not by its own inherent strength, at any rate by the obvious failure of all the attempts which had been made to carry it."²

¹ Agassiz's *Memoir* (1850), prefixed to *Footprints of the Creator*, p. 21.

² *Essays*, ii., p. 69.

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Of course he was doing no more than what every scientific man of the first importance was prepared to homologate. Miller was strictly right in declaring that geologists and palæontologists alike rejected the theory of development. Some of the lesser men of science might toy with the heresies of Buffon or Lamarck; philosophers like Spencer, or poets like Goethe, may have been already on the main track, following it out to fruitful results; but the strictly scientific leaders, the "damned compact majority," as Ibsen would call them, were dead set against such speculations. Lyell, strange to say, despite his great anti-catastrophal and developmental work in geology, was an opponent of Evolution till converted by Darwin. As a good Unitarian, however, he drew the line at Man. Sedgwick withstood even Darwin, describing his book

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“as false and grievously mischievous.”¹ Murchison’s testimony is, “I fearlessly say that our geological record does not afford one scintilla of evidence to support Darwin’s theory,” and he died (1871) an unbeliever. Cuvier (died 1832), usually regarded as the founder of palæontology—though he must share the honour with Lamarck—had held to the idea of successive cataclysms of destruction, which cleared the ground for fresh creations ; and Cuvier was the master-influence

¹ He had written Miller in 1849 on receiving a copy of the *Footprints* (London 1849) to this effect: “You will find that your opinions on religious points nearly run parallel with mine. I hold (against the Huttonians) that Creation had a beginning in time . . . that man is the last of the existing order of things, and that animal creations are not now going on, as Lyell seems to think probable. I have made this one of the links in an analogical argument in favour of Christianity.” *Life of Sedgwick*, vol. ii., p. 161.

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of the time.¹ Owen, upon whom his mantle fell, though not a supporter of "special creation," wavered curiously. Agassiz, of course, died (1873) in the conviction that "there is no evidence of a direct descent of later from earlier species in the geological succession of animals." Huxley, even, later the most outstanding and redoubtable champion of Darwinism, though he had abandoned the "creation" formula, was "agnostic," until Darwin, as he puts it, "thrust under our noses" some of "the most patent and notorious of natural facts," whose "paramount significance" all had equally failed till then to discern. After this we need feel the less

¹ Cp. for modern attitude : "The uniformity of Nature is, of course, quite incompatible with all such doctrines. And we may feel very thankful if we have heard the last of them." (Prof. Momerie's *Belief in God*, cheap edition, p. 59.)

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surprise that Miller gave no quarter to the Development Hypothesis.

The position, indeed, was, at every point, most attractive. The idea of Development was organically repugnant to him, inasmuch as he believed that it "cashiers the Creator as such, and substitutes, instead, a mere animal manufacturing piece of clock-work, which bears the name of natural law." He knew that, in attacking it, he had the support of current scientific opinion of the most authoritative character, and for that he had always the profoundest respect. Robert Dick declared that, "friend Hugh had rather too much veneration for sundry great living men, to strike out a new path," and, writing to him, says, with his usual frankness: "You, Mr Miller, rule by 'Authorities.' Your humble servant has often found them sleep-

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ing, and has no reverence for them." It was all part of Miller's mental make-up, and not to be changed by an admonition. For the present he had a work on hand into which he could throw himself with his whole soul, at once pleasing his religious friends and keeping full in line with the greatest scientific experts. His dealings with the Development theory in all its branches have thus a peculiar gusto and exhaustiveness, which, in the confidence of his position, led him often to a scornfulness of reference and even to a lack of fairness, which by no means add to the effectiveness of the general argument. The author of the *Vestiges of Creation*, the particular occasion of the *Footprints of the Creator* (1847), has to protest against being made responsible for the fancies of De Maillet and Oken. He finds himself, too, included in

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the affirmation that "all the leading assertors of the development hypothesis have been bad geologists," though as Robert Chambers—a fact not then known—the author of *Ancient Sea Margins*, Miller quoting with approval from "that singularly interesting and meritorious work," had already given him a certificate to the contrary. Nay, more, he is told that, "faith in a special superintendence of Deity is not yet dead," and that, "He who created the human mind" has taken "especial care in its construction, that, save in a few defective specimens of the race, the belief should never die." This being so, we need not wonder at the suggestion that Oken's "inspiration" was due to "a lying spirit." Chambers would appear to have hit back with some effect when he pointedly censured those critics, "whose geological doctrines have

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exposed them to similar misconstruction," and who "themselves hardly escaped from the rude hands of the narrow-minded," were "yet eager to join that rabble against a new and equally unfriended stranger, as if such were the best means of purchasing impunity for themselves." Miller's retort was a disparaging reference to "the character of the intellects" associated with the "development hypothesis." At the same time it must be granted that, if excuse for such polemics there can be, there was much more for Miller than for Huxley, who had to confess that, "the only review I ever had qualms of conscience about, on the ground of needless savagery, is one I wrote on the *Vestiges*."¹ The book, he says, "irritated me by the prodigious ignorance and thoroughly unscientific habit of mind manifested by the

¹ *Life and Letters*, vol. i., p. 168.

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writer." Miller had already affirmed that the author was entirely defective in the "powers of abstract reflection." Strange to consider that, in spite of all this, he was fundamentally right and his Rhadamanthine critics were wrong. The *Vestiges* improved with every edition, and, in Darwin's judgment, did "excellent service."

In the nature of the case it was, however, impossible for Miller to give the Development Hypothesis a disinterested, strictly scientific examination. Such detachment of mind is not common even now. The origin of all organic existence was vouched for from another source in plain, unquestioned terms, such as could not be gainsaid without the gravest consequences. If once the operation of natural laws were admitted as explanatory of the origin of any species, where was the

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process to stop? True development necessitates something which is to be developed, is not thus a theory of ultimate origination, and so, Miller confessed, is quite compatible "with belief in the existence of a First Great Cause." But that, as we have seen, was a comparatively small matter in Miller's theology. To put laws between God and animate existence struck at the belief in a present Deity guiding the affairs of the universe so far as they affected organic life and man in especial; and guiding man so far as he, with his fatal gift of free-will, would let Him. Above all, it struck at the foundation of his religious metaphysic, "The belief that 'God created man upright,' and that man, instead of proceeding onward and upward from this high and fair beginning to a higher and fairer standing in the scale of creation, sank, and became morally lost and

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degraded." Evolution, by reversing the process, shattered this postulate, and dragged to the dust with it the ancient and awesome structure built thereon. With it went "belief in the immortality and responsibility of man, and in the scheme of salvation by a Mediator and Redeemer"; all which is, in Miller's view, an absolutely essential "part of man's moral constitution." Thus, "the development doctrines are doing much harm on both sides of the Atlantic, especially among intelligent mechanics, and a class of young men engaged in the subordinate departments of trade and the law." These unfortunates became materialists, and, as a consequence, "turbulent subjects and bad men." The "descensus Averni" is always an easy one down Miller's logic. And, as so often, the apt retort comes in his own words; one more example of that

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doubleness of mental outlook which he strove so hard to bring to a common focus: "Men should pursue the truth simply for its own sake, and independently either of the consequences which it may be found to involve or of the company with which it may bring them acquainted." Miller is, of course, not to be censured for seeking to bring all his convictions into tune. Where he erred was in holding that one string's pitch was settled and unalterable, so that the other chords had, with however much straining and torsion, to be accommodated to that standard. Spencer's criticism is, therefore, implicit in his own words, as quoted above:—"In brief, he fell short of that highest faith, which knows that all truths must harmonise; and which is, therefore, content trustfully to follow the evidence whithersoever it leads." (Spencer's

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Essays, vol. i., p. 356). But, on the other hand, with how many is this still a counsel of perfection? How many more escape the fate of Miller by timidly refraining from doing what he was too honest and too brave to shirk? His task, moreover, was one of such gravity and delicacy as few of us, nowadays, can realise. Dick, indeed, was at polar distance from his friend. He could not away with, "that, to me at least, unpalatable thing, a patchwork creation—a system of odds and ends, of clippings and parings. I cannot believe that this earth ever saw a creation but one." But then Dick was travelling lightweight: "I have thrown Calvin's theory to the winds. There are as many Gospel theories as there are geological." He was free of his scientific craft, but it was with a great price: he was a social outcast, a boycotted trades-

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man; denounced from the pulpit, tract-pestered from the parlour; a lonely, loveless, superlatively modest man. Which gives us some idea of the terrible sword that ever hung, to his own knowledge, over Miller's head. Even from Cromarty, "a weak but well-meaning bodie" sent Dick "a pious bookie about the state of my soul," warning him likewise that "the spades, perhaps, are made that will dig my grave." Dick received the savage impertinence with a jest: it would have pierced Miller to the heart, and left to the end a rankling wound.

Still, it is by the decision he made that Miller must, scientifically, stand or fall. It so happened that he had come across the Development Hypothesis in rather fantastic guise at an early date, as, for example, in the *Telliamed* of Benoît de Maillet (1656-1738)

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who foreshadowed Lamarckism, but derived birds from the flying-fish and man from the mermaid's husband. To him it was thus really nothing new, but simply the expression of that rebellious, godless nature incident to fallen man. Considered geologically, however, it was easy to test it by a canon justifiably deducible from the form in which it was at first presented, viz.: "the earlier fossils ought to be very *small* in size," and "very *low* in organisation." He does not appear to have known, or he ignored the fact that his friend, Agassiz, had stated, "that the lower condition of structure and development is" frequently "manifested in a more bulky body."¹ *Asterolepis*, then, the enormous fish which Dick and himself had dug in frag-

¹ Cited in *Vestiges of Creation*, latest edition: Proofs, etc., p. xxxiii.

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ments out of the Caithness flagstones,¹ and which is the picturesque kernel of the *Footprints*, was a very giant among fishes and of high structural organisation. The argu-

¹ For the fossil remains out of which Miller's organism was constructed, he was mainly indebted to Dick, as he readily acknowledges. (See early chapters of the *Footprints*, *passim*.) On page 20 of that work he writes: "The oldest organism yet discovered in the most ancient geological system of Scotland in which vertebrate remains occur, *seems* to be the *Asterolepis* of Stromness." Of course it was not the "most ancient system," etc. (see pp. 112, 167); and a note in the reprinted *Footprints* corrects the opening statement as to the "oldest organism." Miller did not carry Dick with him in his general conclusions, as we have seen. In 1863 Dick wrote: "Hugh Miller, to his dying day, insisted that nothing *organic* lived in the north of Scotland previous to the deposition of the old Red Conglomerate. . . . He knew and acknowledged the Silurians of the south of Scotland; but he argued that Durness limestone was of Old Red age. . . . But what would Hugh have thought of fish underlying the Old Red Conglomerate? . . . The other day I turned up and brought home with me to Thurso the remains of fish that had lain buried beneath the Old Red Conglomerate."

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ment is amplified by the further plea that some of the earliest specimens of flora and fauna yet discovered were of the most advanced type, and not in the least defective or rudimentary. Inferior types of life there were, but with them co-existed superior types; both were found together as far back as research went: it was impossible, therefore, to contend that the higher forms were developed from the lower. Geology, which should have provided the evidence of this, absolutely refused to render the case even probable. The core of the argument, then, is the highly developed character of the structure of the most primitive fishes.

Now if we admit Miller's assumption that the geological evidence is a crucial test, and his explicit claim that "human observation has been spread over a period sufficiently

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extended to furnish the necessary data for testing the development hypothesis" it cannot be denied that from his standpoint, the argument is conclusive. In the *Origin of Species*, indeed, Darwin had admitted that "Geology assuredly does not reveal any such finely graduated organic chain," as his theory of descent seemed to demand. In 1862 Huxley could still confess that the "positively ascertained truths of palæontology" negated "the common doctrines of progressive modification." Eight years later he is less agnostically severe, but still maintains that, "it is no easy matter to find clear and unmistakable evidence of filiation among fossil animals." These from two addresses to the Geological Society of London. On the other hand, in 1859 Spencer was writing in the *Universal Review* that "it must be admitted that the facts of

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palæontology can never suffice either to prove or disprove the developement hypothesis."

A fundamental mistake lies in the assumption that the geological record is perfect, instead of being, as can easily be understood, exceedingly defective. The portion of the earth's surface carefully examined is very small: the examination is still incomplete. All that has been preserved has not been discovered; and everything that has existed has not been preserved. Only certain portions of an organic structure are capable of being fossilised. When we pass below *Asterolepis* (or properly speaking *Homosteus Milleri* since his *Asterolepis* is made up of portions of several different organisms¹) we

¹ Mainly *Homosteus* and *Glyptolepis*: the genus *Asterolepis* instituted by Eichwald includes neither of these. (Traquair in *Proc. Geol. Soc. Glas.* vol. xii., pt. ii. p. 258.) Miller was misled by Agassiz. (*Footprints*, p. 23.)

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find the fish remains of the earlier age exceedingly imperfect, so that it is possible to fix only a few of the numerous species that must then have lived. Nor can these even be accepted as quite the first. The earlier organisms were, no doubt, precisely of the sort which would scarcely yield fossil remains, and the rocks in which these might have been preserved have been crushed, removed or metamorphosed to a blinding extent. Of the geological volume, in fact, as Darwin puts it, "only here and there a short chapter has been preserved; and of each page, only here and there a few lines."

As for the question of internal organisation, all that Miller says may be admitted, once we are clear in our interpretation of the terms used. High organisation means with him that the earliest fishes possessed many

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characteristics of a higher order, namely the reptiles. In their structure they were partly reptilian. Quite so, their specialisation as fishes was incomplete. Their structure was high, but general in type. In the course of specialisation, of closer adaption to their medium and necessities of life, fishes grew out of these inclusive characteristics and evolved into the more highly developed organisms of to-day; while the general types less suited to their special environment disappeared. *Asterolepis*, as Miller made it up, was in size and at certain points comparable to such a reptile as the alligator; then the more of a reptile it was, the less of a fish proper. As the fish side of these earlier forms developed, the reptilian side slowly vanished, or developed in analogous fashion along its own line. Evolution is to be judged

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only by degree of specialisation ; it has nothing to do with the moral connotations of such words as "progression" or "degradation." The earlier fishes were, structurally, higher animals but lower fishes than the present, as is shown by the fact that save for a few secluded species they have failed to persist.

However, coming as he did on the eve of a great and necessary revolution of opinion on these matters, Miller is himself profluent of what he would style "prophecies" of what shape the revolution should take. The following list of passages, selected here and there, is like a series of mental finger-posts.

"I must continue to hold . . . that this solid earth was at one time, from the centre to the circumference, a mass of molten matter . . . with the oblate sphericity of the earth

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and the planets to be accounted for, those who continue to hold (the contrary) will be reduced, if they persist, to the unphilosophical necessity of regarding as a consequence of miracle, a peculiarity of shape easily explainable on the principles of known law."

"And yet the record does seem to speak of *development and progression*; not, however, in the province of organised existence, but in that of insensate matter subject to the purely chemical laws."

"The general advance in Creation has been incalculably great. The lower divisions of the vertebrata preceded the higher—the fish preceded the reptile, the reptile preceded the bird, the bird preceded the mammiferous quadruped, and the mammiferous quadruped preceded man."

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“The adaptation which takes place in the forms and constitution of plants and animals, when placed in circumstances different from their ordinary ones, is equally striking. . . . And hence . . . the derivation of an argument, good so far as it goes, for changes in adaptation to altered circumstances of the organisation of plants and animals, and for the improbability of instinct.”

“Geology abounds with creatures of the intermediate class: there are none of its links more numerous than its connecting links. . . . It supplies in abundance those links of generic connection which, as it were, marry together dissimilar races.”

“And it is this union of traits, pertaining to what are now widely separated orders, that imparts to not a few of the vegetables of the

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Coal Measures their singularly anomalous character."

"Of the Ganoids . . . some were remarkable for the strangeness of their forms, and some for constituting links of connection which no longer exist in nature."

"What seems to be the Upper Old Red of our own country . . . has furnished the remains of a small reptile, equally akin, it would appear, to the lizards and the batrachians."

"The more aberrant genera . . . were comparatively short-lived."

"But in the Palæotheres of the Eocene, which ranged in size from a large horse to a hare, not a few of the missing links have been found—links connecting the tapirs to the hogs, and the hogs to the Palæotheres proper; and there is at least one species

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suggestive of a union of some of the more peculiar traits of the tapirs and the horses.”

“The Dinotherium, one of the greatest quadrupedal animals that ever lived, seems to have formed a connecting link in this middle age between the Pachydermata and the Cetaceæ.”

“The human brain is built up by a wonderful process, during which it assumes in succession the form of the brain of a fish, of a reptile, of a bird, of a mammiferous quadruped; and, finally, it takes upon it its unique character as a human brain.” (This is the early form of the “Recapitulation Doctrine,” and would have to be modified in expression.)

No wonder Huxley said that if there had been no theory of evolution already in exist-

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ence, the palæontologist would have been forced to invent one. In these passages it seems to suggest itself as an absolute necessity of thought. In fact no theory was ever more inevitable if a single step forward was to be taken.

Miller indeed appears to have been scared, in connection with the last quotation, at where he was being led to. So he warns his readers against grave mistakes and misconceptions, and, as against "the more ingenious speculations of the Lamarckians," has resort for explanation of the puzzling phenomena to Agassiz's and Owen's verbalisms about "Geologic Prophecies," that is, that the Creator in these comprehensive types was laying a sort of ground plan for future operations, hinting at what he was about to do. Yet the answer to the puzzle was at his hand.

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On any other hypothesis than that of descent by modification it all seems so purposeless and confusing. Bayne thinks that had Miller lived he might have been converted by the exposition of Darwin. But Mrs Miller thought that Dr McCosh was the man to settle Darwin!¹ And Miller's objection was not mainly to any particular presentation of the Development Theory, but to the very idea of it. In terms of the case he could not possibly accept it so long as he believed that Evolution in any form made Christianity "an idle and unsightly excrescence," and "would strike down . . . all the old landmarks, ethical and religious." Darwin's work was overwhelmingly convincing to an open mind; the evidence was then "gross as a mountain." But to the scientific imagination full material

¹ Prefatory Remarks to *Footprints*, p. lxi.

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for a comprehensive generalisation was already in existence. Miller himself affords it. Evolution is but the general expression of his own formula, that "Geology is natural history extended over all ages." Those who were waiting for *demonstrative* evidence of the truth of the Evolution principle, are waiting for it yet. Those who refuse the generalisation are at liberty to try how they can get on without it. And its modal value does not stand or fall with either Darwinism or Neo-Lamarekism. As for "creation" we have the testimony of Professor Owen, to whom Miller was so fond of appealing, that by it "the Zoologist meant 'a process he knows not what'" (Cited *Origin of Species* p. xxv.). That is, it slams the door in the face of further enquiry. To that not even Hugh Miller would have submitted, had he

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so realised "creation." But to him it was perfectly intelligible: "In acquainting myself with the organisms of the geologic periods, I have been similarly but more deeply impressed by what I must be permitted to term the *human* cast and character of the contrivances which they exemplified. Not only could I understand the principles on which they were constructed, but further, not a few of them had, I found, been actually introduced into works of human invention ages ere they were discovered in the rock." Thus did the contrivances of the human intellect give the clue to the fashioning by a personal Deity of all the forms of organic existence. Again and again does Miller speak of the "style" of the Deity as confidently as did the village curé in *La Rôtisserie*,¹

¹ "Voilà de belles paroles, dit M. le Cure. C'est Dieu lui-même qui vous le dicte. *J'y reconnais son style inimitable.*"

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and even says of a certain beautiful coral that it was constructed in "meet harmony with the tastes and faculties of the Divine Worker"!¹ To this early position he was too deeply committed, ever to change his opinion. And it is the less likely that he would have done so, as long as Murchison and Agassiz saw no reason to change theirs. Sad it is to realise that the "sweating pages" of the *Testimony of the Rocks*, and the *Footprints of the Creator*—with their masses of vivid exposition and long chains of argument—were penned in a lost cause: that the severe handling which the documentary testimony has received, makes the former look foolish; while Evolution, the antipathy of the latter, has, half a century after, been impropriated for evangelistic

¹ *Testimony of the Rocks*, p. 220.

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theology by a Moderator of the pre-union Free Kirk — the church of which Miller himself was the joint founder, and to which he was fain to commit the scientific defence of a rigid faith.

CHAPTER VIII

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MILLER lived through stirring, changeful times in the world of politics. He was contemporary with the later Reform agitation which culminated in '32; with Catholic Relief, Negro Emancipation, the Municipal Reform Act, Chartism and the beginning of Factory Legislation, the new Poor Law, the struggle for a Free Press, the Abolition of the Corn Laws, and the first tentative efforts towards a National Education. Here was a range of social problems and solutions upon which we might look, from a vigorous, reflective mind among the lower classes, for helpful comment or suggestion.

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Beliefs, practices, ideals, methods, constitutions and Churches were all passing through a memorable ordeal. Scarcely in his earlier village days, and still less when at the head of a powerful newspaper and a prominent man, could Miller avoid making his personal contribution to the general stock of opinion.

The first step is hopeful. Alone in his own particular circle he stood out for Catholic Relief when nineteen-twentieths of the Cromarty householders had petitioned against it. The existing state of things, he believed, was grossly unfair to the Roman Catholics ; and wherever a case of injustice could be made out, Hugh Miller's reaction against it could be depended upon. In the matter of Parliamentary Reform, however, he was curiously dispassionate and serene. He was "pleased" with the success of the popular movement, being himself "one

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of the people." But, on the other hand, he "had early come to see that toil, physical and intellectual, was to be my portion throughout life, and that through no possible improvement in the government of the country could I be exempted from labouring for my bread." This is a naively irrelevant excuse for his irresponsible attitude as a citizen. The same indifference to civil obligations comes out in the account—superciliously humorous—of his experiences as a town councillor. Because some of his colleagues affected airs in their new position ; because others were unsound financially ; and all were given, more or less, to rather pompous oratory, while Miller could not make a speech for the life of him ; we find him, after taking the trouble to be elected, attending one meeting, and thereafter playing the absentee, in ostentatious fashion, for the

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rest of his term of office. It is the same man who, at a later date, makes it out to be a serious defect of Trades Unionism that the "gabbers" were bound to lead in the movement, wherefore it was the business of the steady, sober-minded man to keep out of it altogether. Meanwhile, of course, he, in both cases, by his actions and his counsel, was doing his very best to make certain the results which he professed to fear. To pour ridicule or acrimonious denunciation, as Miller was so fond of doing, upon all advanced movements, is but to play into the hands of the privileged and the autocratic; whose dominance, again, he would have been one of the first to resent and assail once it made itself felt personally.

Of the Radical reformers he can scarcely speak in decent terms. "In Cromarty," he writes to Miss Dunbar, "we are infested with

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a kind of vermin called Radicals." So far as can be gathered, the major offences of these Radicals were a certain disrespect towards the Rev. Mr Stewart; a capacity for fooling a stupid local magistracy; and a decided leaning towards Moderatism or Latitudinarianism in Church affairs. The comparison is amplified and made more comprehensive in an early pamphlet: "There is a class of men, which in the present day infests almost every civilised country in Europe." He likens them to "the desolating locusts of the East"; professes to "trace the slime of those reptiles in almost every dark page of the annals of modern Europe"; and finally dismisses them as being "as devoid of genuine talent as of sterling principle." He avoids names, and he never seems to have been familiar, in any direct fashion, with the teaching of the men

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whom he was vilifying. Obviously, too, he is, as he always was, under the necessity of scoring off his opponents, and winning the victory verbally, if not in any other way. Once more it arrides one to find, later, himself and the "Witness" rebuked in companion terms, by a ponderous Edinburgh organ, for suggestions to incendiarism and the law of the guillotine !

After this there is nothing for Chartism but a temperamental snap, "I hate Chartism." The Chartists are "full of words, but infirm of judgment and devoid of principle." Thus he was not inclined to grant the five pound franchise to the householders of Edinburgh or Glasgow, since that would be, practically, to secure a representation of pugnacious Chartists ; but he thought it might be safely extended to a similar class in some petty

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northern burghs, for whom again in relation to municipal affairs he had little but heavy sarcasm. He would have been aghast at the idea of so much of the rather harmless Charter becoming common law, as actually now exists as such. Yet he admits the rationality of the whole movement. He failed even to systematise his prejudices. In the opening chapter of the *Old Red Sandstone*, he who had boasted once and again that, he was "not a giver of advices, nor a taker of them either," and that "the giver of advices is a blockhead," leads off with several pages of "advice to young working men." "It must be confessed," he writes, "that they (the upper classes) have been doing comparatively little for you, and a great deal for themselves." This was just the logic of the Chartists, who concluded that the thing to do was to follow the example,

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and secure power to do some deal for themselves in turn. He could even understand the excesses of the physical force men. "I have"—this from a letter—"great sympathy with the poor Chartists and Radicals who, having to work sixteen hours per day for a meagre livelihood, avenge their hard fate on all and sundry when they break loose." Similarly while he deprecated the Trade Union movement, into which most of what was best in Chartism really passed; and, though admitting the abstract right to combine, had no confidence that in the matter of wages any good could be done through strikes; yet he strongly advised the working men to use the power of the strike to secure a Saturday half holiday. Only now has the privilege been legally secured for the factory workers; but what Miller did not see was that the

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striking for a holiday on the same weekly wage virtually meant an increase of wage, as many of the operatives have since been made to understand.

In fact, if any thing is more remarkable than Miller's reactionary propaganda in some directions, it is his revolutionary advances in others. He battled for a *National* as opposed to the clerical idea of a *Denominational* education, and sketched a scheme which in its essentials—down to the religious compromise—foreshadowed that of nearly a quarter of a century after. For this reason, and because he laid his emphasis upon the *secular* side of education, and maintained that “for many years the national teaching of Scotland has *not* been religious”; and demanded full religious toleration in the schools, he was denounced in the current invective as “an

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infidel"! He wrote decisively against the iniquities of the Game Laws denouncing them as crime and criminal makers, instead of the reverse. He advocated a wider franchise, albeit that, in his dread of democracy, he would hedge it considerably. And on a vital question, alas! still of present interest, he spoke clearly and incisively; "It is idle to speak of sanitary reform, and almost idle to speak of moral reform, when we contemplate the dwellings of a large portion of the working population." Above all, on the Highland clearances whose antecedents and effects he knew by personal observation and enquiry, his words of condemnation are hot and heavy. On the spot he is provoked to this point in a letter (1846): "They (the Irish) are buying guns, and will be by-and-bye shooting magistrates and clergymen by the score; and

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Parliament will in consequence do a great deal for them. But the poor Highlanders will shoot no one, not even a site-refusing laird or a brutal factor, and so they will be left to perish unregarded in their hovels. I see more and more every day of the philosophy of Cobbet's advice to the chopsticks of Kent, "If you wish to have your wrongs redressed, go out and burn ricks; Government will yield nothing to justice, but a great deal to fear."

There it is. Bring Miller face to face with concrete oppression or injustice or unmerited suffering and the reaction is volcanic. Where his feelings are not strongly moved or the results do not directly affect him, he is sympathetic or critical according as the movement is or is not intellectually agreeable to him. Thus he "loves the Chartists," but the

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political methods and measures with which they identify themselves are utterly repugnant. And the reason is that he was constitutionally incapable of appreciating the stimuli. He was himself indifferent to discomfort; his ambitions were not social but literary. "I would not give a very little literary celebrity for all the money I ever saw," he writes at thirty-two. Even when in, he was not of, the industrial stream; its currents, its pools, its wreckages scarcely affected him in his parochial backwater. Once, at Niddrie, he had suffered somewhat from the jealousy and tyrannical interference of his fellow-workmen, though a little humour might have saved the situation; and after all it was a workman himself—and that one of the most dissolute of the band—who came to his rescue. But he never forgot it, and in judging of the

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workers he always harked back to this solitary experience as decisive, just as he judged all Radicals alike from their Cromarty exemplars. For himself he could live at ease on anything from half-a-crown to nine shillings a week, work seven-eighths of his waking hours, and retire to forgetfulness and bliss with a poet or a philosopher. Hence the advice he gives to working men that they should read good books, preferably the Bible, and equal their masters in knowledge if not in wealth. He knew their sorrows, their hard life, their crowded, uncomfortable and unhealthy dwellings, and the social despotism to which they were subjected. But, "if all your minds were cultivated, not merely intellectually, but morally also, you would find yourselves, as a body, in the possession of a power which every charter in the world could not confer upon

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you, and which all the tyranny or injustice in the world could not withstand." All which, in view of the miserable condition of things in the forties, reads uncommonly like the advice of the French Princess who, when told that the people were grumbling because they had no bread, innocently asked why they did not eat cake ! Other working men were not after the sample of Hugh Miller, and it is no wonder that when they did want an anodyne they preferred to take it in the form of whisky and "drawing-the-badger."

Behind individual utterances Miller had, of course, his political philosophy, to which we must resort in order to resolve his apparently random inconsistencies. Here as elsewhere we have, as the mental backing, a compound of the opposing principles of Authority and Individuality. We have

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noticed Dick's impression as to Miller's "veneration for sundry great living men" in scientific matters. Religiously again he required a source finally unquestionable. "In every form of Christianity," he writes, "in which men are earnest, there must exist an *infallibility* somewhere." Down from that he sought the fullest amplitude of rational discourse. Miller was no mystic : Scotch religion had no place for such. Being thus mentally constituted, he correspondingly fashions his philosophy of life : "It is according to the fixed economy of human affairs that individuals should lead, and that masses should follow ; for the adorable Being who wills that the lower order of minds should exist by myriads, and produces the higher so rarely, has willed also, by inevitable consequences, that the many should be guided by the few.

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On the other hand, it is not less in accordance with the dictates of His immutable justice, that the interests of the few should be subordinate to the more extended interests of the many. The leading minds are to be regarded rather as formed for the masses, than the masses for them." All this is either *a priori* platitude or Carlyle and water. There is of course no means of checking Miller's representation of the "will" of Providence. Otherwise we have simply an advocacy of aristocracy or government by the best, which nobody dissents from; the standing difficulty being to discover those who are, in the necessary all-round sense, the best. The difficulty is not eased by the way in which the results are pictured as working out: "True it is, that while the one principle acts with all the un-deviating certainty of a natural law, the other

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operates partially and uninterruptedly with all the doubtful efficiency of a moral; and hence those long catalogues of crimes committed against the species by these natural leaders, which so fill the pages of history." An arrangement which forces men helplessly to obey "natural leaders" who, in their turn, are nevertheless permitted to ruin and maltreat their followers, seems sadly one-sided. But the extract, verbiage though it be, throws a light upon the workings of Miller's mind, further intensified by his insistence upon "those natural barriers which protect the various classes of society." The check upon possible tyranny "in the rulers" is "political power" among the people, to be secured by the spread of "intelligence"; though most people would prefer it, for the immediate purpose, in the form of votes, of which Miller

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was rather sparing, and in which he never much believed. Here then was that side of Miller's mind which led him to speak of himself as in one way a Tory, "a Tory in feeling—at least as far as a profound respect for the great and the venerable can constitute one such"—that is, of the Scott type. On the other hand he was "a Whig in principle"—a curious divorce further exemplified in his religious antithesis between "feelings" and "beliefs"—which seems to indicate that in a party sense Miller never really knew where he was. Nor indeed was it easy for a man of independent mind to place himself. Politics had resolved itself into a bare fight between two great groups for power and places; and the new Toryism of Canning and Peel was hardly distinguishable from the reviving Whiggery. Miller was thus confined to a

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tabernacle of his own. His conceptions ever ran up a ladder of clearly defined classes, which implicitly represented for him "grades" of intelligence, up which one could climb by the power of knowledge. Where the theory did not work out in practice he discerned the maleficent influence of man's own will upsetting the symmetrical scheme. Perhaps: but it is this very "will" that makes the problem, and that is not to be solved by its elimination.

It is time to get at Miller the Whig—"but a Whig of 1689" is his all-important qualification. We are now touching the foundation. Miller was a Whig on his own lines, as Scott was a Tory on his: the latter influenced by his romantic instincts, the former by his ecclesiasticism. For the Whig of 1689 was primarily a church politician, one who sought civil freedom not for itself, but merely as a step

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towards ecclesiastical freedom, as he conceived it. The Scottish Whig of 1689 was the Whig of the Revolution Settlement, who was a revolutionist because he was a Presbyterian, and because his church ideal was incompatible with the other sort of politics. Civil liberty was really a subsidiary matter, a step to something higher, inasmuch as, like Sir Thomas Browne, he counted the world "not an inn but an hospital; and a place not to live, but to die in." Such was precisely the Whiggism of Cromarty during the eighteenth century, to which Miller traced his lineage, and which he has himself thus described: "their Whiggism was a Whiggism of the future world only, and the liberty of preparing themselves for heaven was the only liberty they deemed worth fighting for." Such too is the key to what will appear his rather errant readings of Scottish history;

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“The Scottish character seems by no means so favourably constituted for working out the problem of civil liberty as that of the English”; or, “Scotland has produced no true patriots”; or, more pronouncedly, “apart from religious considerations, the Scotch affect a cheap and frugal patriotism, that achieves little and costs nothing. In the common English, on the contrary, there is much of that natural independence which the Scotchman wants”; all being summed up in the declaration that, “The development of the popular mind in Scotland is a result of its theology.” With the real foundation of truth as to the importance of the part played in later Scottish history by ecclesiastical struggles, there is much that is obviously astray due to the theological squint which is always taking Miller out of the straight path. But, thus informed, we can

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understand why he never took a very deep interest in civil politics as such ; why the religious bearing of state issues always guided his judgment ; why for example he “ preferred Protestantism to Macaulay ” on a certain memorable occasion ; all because in his own words he was “ more ecclesiastical than political in his (my) leanings.” Here his Toryism of “ feeling ”—which is of course just as much a “ principle ” as his Whiggism—vanishes before a purely democratic conception of Church government ; his liberalism has full swing ; and his logic hastens down its “ prone career ” to revolution. Treat him politically as a cipher, he cares not ; so long as you leave him his crust of bread—he thinks the “ dolorous condition ” of the working classes exaggerated because he himself never wanted a shilling when a workman, or his

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father, or his uncles—his books and his independence, he is content, and loyal to his “natural leaders”; but, “Drive our better clergymen to extremities on this question,” he warns Lord Brougham, “let but three hundred of them throw up their livings, as the Puritans of England and the Presbyterians of our own country did in the time of Charles II., and the Scottish Establishment inevitably falls. Your Lordship is a sagacious and far-seeing man. How long, think you, would the English Establishment survive her humble sister? and how long would monarchy exist after the extinction of both?”

It is easy to see now the very pulse of his opposition to Radicals and Chartists as they presented themselves to him. The former bore the doctrinal stain of the French Revolution, which had abolished Christianity,

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while its professors in this country were for him religiously of a like mind. Certainly they did not hesitate to express distrust of the Church, unfortunately, as Miller himself shows for Scotland, not without good reason. The latter, he believed, aimed at the overthrow of all "natural" classes. Thus his animadversions upon Radicals and Chartists are not to be taken as the irritated, superior expressions of misplaced Toryism, but rather as an indication of wide difference of attitude towards Church and State. To those specifically devoted to either there was much in the new movement to cause discomfort. Miller did not, as we have seen, indulge in indiscriminate eulogy of a glorious constitution. But his conception of society is distinctly hierarchical, and to check, for their good, the "natural" rulers, was a vastly different thing

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from trying to bring all down to a common level, and "with the centre mix the pole." Workers, indeed, could be as tyrannical as their superiors, as he had personally experienced, and as we readily admit. But, above all, these godless and levelling politicians approached religious institutions in a spirit far from friendly. The "young Liberals" of Cromarty were Moderates, and Moderatism was as bad for Christianity as the Development Hypothesis. England was infested with a "semi-infidel Liberalism" that was likely to "work greater changes than the damaged corn." But to the moral framework of society the Church was the one foundation. For Miller, organised religion alone stood between the State and the blood and fire of revolution. The religious implications of Radical or any other policy thus

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overshadowed all its merely civil elements. Hence, as he could rarely get these to balance, his oscillation and isolation. His first hopes of an editorship he abandoned because, "I saw no party cause for which I could honestly plead. My ecclesiastical friends had, with a few exceptions, cast themselves into the Conservative ranks ; and there I could not follow them. The Liberals, on the other hand, being in office at the time, had become at least as like their old opponents as their former selves, and I could by no means defend all that *they* were doing. In Radicalism I had no faith ; and Chartism . . . I thoroughly detested." And such was his political attitude practically all through. But an ecclesiastical issue stirred him like the blast of a trumpet. "I had experienced at least the average amount of interest in political

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measures whose tendency and principles I deemed good in the main—such as the Reform Bill, the Catholic Emancipation Act, and the Emancipation of the Negroes; but they had never cost me an hour's sleep. Now, however, I felt more deeply; and for at least one night, after reading the speech of Lord Brougham, and the decision of the House of Lords in the Auchterarder case, I slept none." After this unconscious judgment of relative importance we are the less surprised on being informed that, "those who toil frequently mistake the pressure of the original curse for an effect of misgovernment." And so the murder is out, and Westminster theology is justified of its offspring.

It is always a pleasure to meet Miller on inductive ground which has not been fore-closed, where his native shrewdness and

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insight can have full generalising play. There we have met him before with notable results ; now in the matter of race problems we find him similarly well worth listening to. His pure ethnology is of course primitive ; there was little of permanent value then being done. He rebutted Agassiz's rather curious idea of unity of the human species with diversity of original creation, which was intended to account for the existence of such widely different types. Miller rightly points to the chain of intermediate varieties ; showing once more how closely he trod on the principle of Development. Setting this, however, aside, we come, ultimately, upon a principle even now, in the fuller light, deserving the attention of random racial critics : " We overlook, amid the diversities of form, colour, and language, the specific identity of the human family. The Celt, for

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instance, wants, it is said, those powers of sustained application which so remarkably distinguish the Saxon; and so we agree on the expediency of getting rid of our poor Highlanders by expatriation as soon as possible, and of converting the country into sheep-walks and hunting-parks. It would be surely well to have philosophy enough to remember . . . that the peculiarities of race are not specific and ineradicable, but were induced habits and idiosyncrasies engrafted on the stock of a common nature by accidents of circumstances or development; and that, as they have been wrought into the original tissue through the protracted operation of one set of causes, the operation of another and different set, wisely and perseveringly directed, could scarce fail to unravel and work them out again." This is a good step towards Lamarckism. Another

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practical instance of the same idea of environmental influence comes out in his thesis on geological or geographical determinism: "In glancing over a map of Europe and the countries adjacent, on which the mountain groups are marked, you will at once perceive that Greece and the Holy Land, Scotland and the Swiss cantons, formed centres of great plutonic disturbance of this character. They had each their geologic tremors and perturbances,—long ere their analogous civil history, with its ages of convulsion and revolution, in which man was the agent, had yet commenced its course. And, indirectly at least, the disturbed civil history was in each instance a consequence of the disturbed geologic one." Analysis of this sort has still, it is unflattering to say, a smack of novelty, at a time when historic explanation is either shunned, or pre-

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sented mainly in the form of verbalisms about "race" and "innate capacity," analogous to the empty "caloric principle" which explained the phenomena of heat for the earlier physicists. On specific political issues, too, Miller could take a leading line, when impelled not by narrow impulses but by wise sociological considerations. "Of all great losses and misfortunes," is his patriotic aphorism, "the *taking* of a nation is the greatest and most incurably calamitous." "War," he wrote, "is an evil in all circumstances. It is a great evil even when just; it is a great evil even when carried on against a people who know and respect the laws of nations. But it is peculiarly an evil when palpably not a just war, and when carried on against a barbarous people." For "a war between wild and civilised men . . . takes its tone, not from

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the civilisation of the one, but from the cruel savageism of the other." The lapse of years, however it may have affected Miller's attitude on other problems, has, unhappily, on these neither staled his wisdom nor made unprofitable his example. But least of all was it to be expected that we should find him with his static religious conceptions formulating a principle more positively argued by Buckle: "that not only does religion exert a beneficial effect on civilisation, but that civilisation may, in turn, react with humanising influence on the religious." ¹ Tentatively put, no doubt; but a big stride for the man in the atmosphere and circumstances in which he moved.

¹ *Scenes and Legends*, p. 423 ; cf. Buckle's *History of Civilisation*, vol. i. cap. 6.

CHAPTER IX

ECCLESIASTICISM AND EDITORSHIP

MILLER had been at the bank counter for six years when the pivotal event of his life occurred. The circumstances of his famous *Letter to Lord Brougham* (1839) have already been noticed. It resulted in his transference, later in the year, to the editorial chair of *The Witness* newspaper, established in the interests of the Non-Intrusion majority of the Church of Scotland. He was still a comparatively young man, but in his own later judgment, "It was too late ere I was caught."¹

¹ Bayne's *Life and Letters*, ii. p. 346.

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Miller's attachment to the Church was intense. It represented to him all that was best in the national history, all that was kindest in his home relations, all that was congenial in his companionship; and the triple cord was hard to break. Yet the terms of adherence might be made dishonouring; and, had she acquiesced in the Auchterarder decision, "the leaf," he says, "holds not more loosely by the tree, when the October wind blows highest, than I would have held by a Church so sunk and degraded."

The endowment of the Church he held to be the patrimony of the people of Scotland, and the Non-Intrusion agitation a brave effort to win it back for its rightful possessors from the hands of an alien few, to whom it had been committed for a political purpose. Yet that, too, would he surrender, sooner than that

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it should become the price of betrayal of the Church's spiritual rights.

For, what was the Church of Scotland without its spiritual independence?—"a mere creature of expediency and the State." The State might take from it the temporalities, with the position and prestige of an Establishment, but it could not make it cease to be the historic Church of Scotland. No body could claim to be such in spirit which would submit to the will of the State its divinely derived spiritual jurisdiction; the right to ordain pastors for the people, and not to force on the people such as were displeasing to them; and the right to deal ecclesiastically with its own servants, and to preach, and regulate preaching in any parish of Scotland. It was intolerable that the rude arm of the Civil Courts should be thrust between the Church

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and its exclusive responsibility to the Divine Head.

In one way, the conflict was as old as ecclesiasticism. It was a phase of the secular struggle as to the respective provinces of Church and State, of civil and canon law. The Church of Scotland, however, did not in Hildebrandine fashion claim superiority. Neither was it the Creature of the State but its Equal: the jurisdictions were co-ordinate but independent: each was a high contracting party to an alliance for mutual advantage. The State, unluckily, would not accept such an interpretation of their relationship, nor any authority in the nation apart or underived from itself. The Courts, therefore, in the name of statute law, ordered the Church to perform certain offices which, in its view, were of purely spiritual significance; for

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which it was, therefore, responsible to no Civil power, but only to its spiritual ruler or head. The Moderate party, according to its name, pled for temporising acquiescence: they might achieve their ends by other means. But the majority was firm; the issues were clear and momentous; the attitude of the State, declared in its courts through a long period of test and negotiation, was equally firm and clear; acquiescence would be fatal and spiritually degrading; and so they came out in "the Disruption" to carry on the "free popular Church," which was Miller's ideal, and for which he early (1839) forecasted the name. Never for a moment, however, did he falter in his contention, that the Church of which he was a member was the true historic Church of Scotland, Free from an incongruous and compromising alliance.

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It was not thus, however, that the issue first presented itself to Miller. For him the primary question was not the conditions of Establishment, but the use to which such an institution should be put. It was the practical matter of the abuses of Patronage that stirred him to action; and he confesses that he "would have much preferred seeing a good, broad, anti-patronage agitation raised on the part of the Church." Miller generally preferred to tackle questions, first, at least, on their practical side. He accepted the Establishment as an historic fact; his attitude all through was typically that of an interested layman. Hence he had taken "no very deep interest" in the abstract side of the Voluntary controversy. He was not to be convinced that all connection with the State was bad for the Church, seeing that the facts

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did not bear out such a contention ; in his own parish, indeed, it had secured " free of cost . . . a series of popular and excellent ministers, whom otherwise the parishioners would have had to pay for themselves." The economic factor was certainly not to be despised, so far as the poorer districts were concerned. On the other hand, he would not be persuaded, " that the Establishment, even in Scotland, was everywhere of value "; or that religion decayed under Voluntaryism ; for here, too, his personal experiences led him to an opposite conclusion. The whole matter was one of expediency rather than principle. " There was religion on both sides of the controversy, but a religious controversy it was not." ¹

Nor did his point of view alter essentially after the Disruption. He opposed in the

¹ *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, p. 542.

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course of the *Witness* crisis the proposal of Dr Candlish to attack all Establishments as such ; but did so on purely practical grounds. In the main he contended that a campaign on those lines would simply succeed in dividing the Protestant forces in the face of the common enemy, Popery, then in an aggressively active condition. Moreover, it would “justly lay our Church open, if waged ere the present generation had passed away, to a charge of gross and suspicious inconsistency,” in so far as it was to be based on “a strictly religious principle,” true in the previous Voluntary fight if true now ; and not on “mere considerations of expediency, which may lead at various times to various courses of conduct.” In this spirit he would, on anti-Popery grounds, abstain from overt attack on “the revolutionised and degraded ” Establishment of

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Scotland, and defend the English Church as well as that unrighteous anomaly the Protestant Establishment of Ireland. Miller, in short, must share with the majority of the leaders the reproach of not discerning the instability of their ecclesiastical position ; and of failing to forecast the destiny of a body organised and related as was the Free Church. Cheap contempt for the Establishment blinded them to the historic lesson of their own Church's inevitable future. Only in some of the strangely qualifying phrases given above, do we catch a hint of suspicion as to what might be the logical outcome of their isolation for the coming generations of Free Churchmen.¹

Miller entered upon his duties as Editor

¹ Compare also the vague, inconclusive reasoning on possible courses of action in *Tendencies*, Part Fifth, in *The Headship of Christ*.

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“in weakness and great fear, thoroughly convinced of the goodness of the cause, but diffident indeed of my own ability to maintain it, as it ought to be maintained, against the hostile assaults of well nigh the whole newspaper press of the Kingdom.” But, “once there, however, I found myself in my true place.” It was a time of strong passions, and keen, riving disputation. Neither side abounded in charity or spared in trying to give as good as it got. The strong position of the Non-Intrusionists, alike in argument and intellectual capacity, was apt to lead them to giving themselves superior airs, and correspondingly to provoke the adversary to desperate retorts. Miller was in his element. “His business,” says Dr Guthrie, “was to fight. Fighting was Miller’s delight.” Then welled to the surface “some of the wild

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buccaneering blood of John Feddes and the old seafaring Millers." If he was not a "bonny fighter," in an aesthetic sense, he was at least a ponderously powerful slogger. There was in him, says Professor Masson, "a tremendous ferocity. It amounted to a disposition to kill. . . . At various times he got into personal controversies, and I know no instance in which he did not leave his adversary not only slain, but battered, bruised, and beaten out of shape. It seemed to be a principle with him—the only principle on which he could fight—that a battle must be *à l'outrance*, that there could be no victory short of the utter extermination of the opposed organism. Hence, in the course of his editorial career, not a few immense, unseemly exaggerations of the polemical spirit—much sledge-hammering where a tap or two would

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have sufficed. A duel of opinions was apt to become with him a duel of reputations and persons." (*Macmillan's Magazine*, vol. xii.) His biographer thinks this "is strongly put," but it is pretty much the idea one carries away from a perusal of Miller's combative work. At all costs he would score; and the spirit that led him to put his ultimate faith in his considerable muscular strength, backed by cudgel or pistol, could not help showing itself in his literary controversy. It is no answer to say that personally and domestically he was the mildest-mannered of men. Torquemada was a man of the gentlest temper, yet in the sincerity of his convictions he headed the Inquisition. A more magnanimous frame of mind in Miller might have lasted better, but then it might not have served the immediate necessities of the case.

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Knox was still the model controversialist of the church militant. Moreover, he was not entirely to blame. Perhaps the sorriest confession which his biographer has to make is that, "Occasionally he was hounded on his prey by the clerical magnates who took interest in *The Witness*—never, I believe, by Chalmers; and he has been heard, on becoming acquainted with persons to whom he had administered the lash, to express his regret, and to add that, "if he had known what manner of man this was, not all the ministers in the Free Church would have persuaded him to inflict the castigation." Thus were bred inevitably animosity and ill-will, and Miller got his full share—not entirely from the victims.

Gradually he had his eyes opened. The clerics would patronise and use him, but they

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would not make him their friend. His scientific excursions must have been to the run of them exceedingly distasteful. Moreover, he was really too big a man for them to handle properly. As Masson again says, "Though they could trust him, and admired him, they could never manage or adequately comprehend him." *He* was the *Witness*, and would be the tool of no political or clerical caucus. He conducted the paper in his own way: "Writing a Vision of the Railroad," growled Chalmers on one occasion, "when we want money." But, though he soon became co-proprietor, it was from no merely selfish interest that he so acted. For him the Free Church was too big a thing altogether to be bound up with the fortunes of any newspaper which might be taken as simply its echo; and still less with the luck of any

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political party, devotion to which would simply bring the new Church to disaster, as it had done the old. Hence it was that "his influence was mightily exerted to prevent the mere ecclesiastical element from assuming that predominance which many alleged to be the object of the whole struggle" (Bayne). No wonder that when the more active spirits in the Church began to realise their newborn power, and became anxious to use it for certain ends, Miller was found to be a wrecking obstacle who would have to be manœuvred round, or even got rid of. But he, single-minded in his unswerving loyalty, was not to be readily suppressed or cajoled. He gave grievous offence by denouncing Macaulay for his share in the Maynooth grant, and so helping ultimately to lose him his seat, and the Whigs a distinguished supporter. His

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defence was that he was "more a Protestant than a politician," and that his "real party principles were (are) those of the Free Church of Scotland." Three years after the Disruption, and in the year of the Macaulay trouble, the dissatisfaction, and the intrigue which grew out of it, came to a head. He was to be "sub-edited," if you please, in the interest of clerical tacticians and the Whig Government. Miller threw down the glove, and the attack collapsed. He was victor, but at what a price! Practically, the Church—Chalmers must always be exempted—turned its back upon *The Witness*. The day was coming when success in journalism, literary or financial, was to turn its back upon the Free Church. He himself thereafter gave more engrossed attention to scientific and literary subjects. Never again did ecclesiastical matters hold for him

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the same absorbing interest. But the wound was there; and his biographer records that "Mrs Miller thinks that about the sum of it is that it broke his heart."¹

Yet no man ever gave more devoted and unsparing labour to a cause than Miller did to the Free Church. His services were unique, and such as no other man, probably, at the time could have rendered. He had himself a clear idea of what best he could do. It would be his business to bring the laymen, particularly those of the operative classes, to her side. The prospect was not encouraging. "The general current of opinion ran strongly against" the Non-Intrusion party. The people of Scotland were in the uncommonly healthy condition of resenting any attempt to aggrandise the Kirk, and magnify the clerical power.

¹ Bayne's *Life and Letters*, ii. p. 297.

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It was Miller's part to persuade them that the cause of the Kirk was their own, the old Whig cause of popular liberty. He had proposed to call *The Witness* at first "The Old Whig." Moreover, the Church was in disfavour popularly because of its open and concerted working for the Tory cause in politics. Miller had to break down all this prejudice and win its possessors to the, as yet, unpopular side. With his great gifts of persuasion and lucid exposition, heightened by the attractive power of his personality, he performed his share of the work triumphantly. The paper penetrated as easily to the workshop as to the drawing-room. Says Dr Guthrie: ¹"The battle of Christ's rights as Head of the Church, and of the people's rights as members of the body of which He is the Head, was fought and won

¹ Cited in Leask's *Hugh Miller*, p. 146.

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in every town and a large number of the parishes of Scotland, mainly by Hugh Miller, through the columns of *The Witness* newspaper." And yet again: "Miller did more than any dozen ecclesiastical leaders, and—Chalmers excepted—he was the greatest of all the men of the Ten Years' Conflict."¹ Yet, as an indication of subsequent clerical feeling towards him, remains the notorious fact that in *The Ten Years' Conflict*, by Dr Buchanan, his name is not once mentioned.² We have seen above how his political recalcitrancy, and laic assertion of private judgment, served to blot out the memory of his transcendent

¹ Cited in Leask's *Hugh Miller*, p. 97.

² Perhaps the most striking testimony to how Miller must have felt this, is the fact that he reviewed the book favourably in the *Witness*, and did not once refer to the slight put upon him. Ordinary insult or rebuff Miller would not have taken in that spirit

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services. It is probably the weariness and smart of it all which we find reflected in the unexpected confession in the autobiography (1854) regarding "the rough field of ecclesiastical controversy—a field into which inclination would never have led me, but which has certainly lain very much in my way, and in which I have spent many a laborious hour." Possibly, as Burke has observed, gratitude is about the last return to be expected in public affairs ; and so it may be superfluous to urge that the charge must be made against the Free Church in respect of its attitude towards Miller. For the Free Church in its making was predominantly the work of two men ; as much above their fellows in practical intelligence as in breadth of view—Thomas Chalmers and Hugh Miller. Miller is not to be passed over with a share in the compliments

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due to the minor champions and useful aids ; he was a protagonist, and is matched by one other alone.

As a journalist pure and simple Miller was not after the present order, nor even after that of his own day. In fact he rather despised the profession. It is the testimony of his biographer that "he had no particle of enthusiasm for the press," and that he "looked with fixed distrust upon journalistic writing, both as culture for a man's own mind and as a means of influencing his fellows." He made no secret of his conviction that the Bible and the Shorter Catechism were better and healthier food for the mind than any number of periodicals. He had to labour in a vocation "never very congenial—that of writing compulsory articles for a newspaper" (Mrs Miller). Here again the *Spectator* influence was heavy

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upon him. *The Witness* leaders normally tended to be elaborate social essays. The personal equation, too, so strong in his particular style of journalism, must always be stated in the terms of theology. As he said himself of Mr Stewart of Cromarty, "The great realities of eternity were never far distant from his thoughts." To the reader his articles may seem to have much of the preacher about them ; the national dowry of most Scotsmen and conspicuously of a more emancipated contemporary, Carlyle. In economics his theological bias sometimes carried him to grotesque results. The emergence of pauperism in Scotland he thought due to a weakening of the spirit of independence, further traceable, as we might look for him to conclude, to a change in the "religious sentiments." Formerly these people lived on "in their honesty and in-

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dependent poverty, relying for support on the promise of their heavenly Father but asked not the help of man." Which religious Whiggism Carlyle had already, in another connection, declared to mean, "that the pigs be taught to die without squealing." (*London Life*, i. 192.)

It was impossible for a man of Miller's calibre, however, to touch journalism without distinguishing it. His range of contributions is astonishing. There was no need for any "specials" on his staff. From an article on Dugald Stewart and his merits as an expounder of the "Scottish School," to one on "Royal Progresses" was but another dip of the pen. True, his methods are discursive and elaborately allusive; while his style, probably from the need of compression, is, in contrast with his serener manner, more vigorous and

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close-knit. But in those days newspapers were less common, and received more careful attention. One can fancy how differently a modern reporter or special correspondent would have dealt with such a subject as the opening of the Scott Monument. Not in this fashion: "The Masonic Brethren of the several lodges mustered in great numbers. It has been stated that more than a thousand took part in the procession. Coleridge, in his curious and highly original work, *The Friend*," etc. And so we are in for a paragraph of philosophic reflection. In *A Vision of the Railroad*, that powerfully conceived and written presentation of the horrors incident to a savagely bloody revolution, we have Miller's usual easy logic leading us from Sunday trains to "red ruin and the breaking up of laws." But with all this and much more of a purely personal

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or ecclesiastical colour—such as heavy sarcasm on ritual and organs—we have shrewd remark and sound reasoning in goodly quantity. Miller never wearied of preaching the necessity of moral purity alike for nations and individual. He ever laid the emphasis upon personal possibilities and powers, correlatively being apt to under-estimate the value of external and mechanical aids.

Miller's literary opinions have already been outlined. He did not rank himself with the by no means small number of religious people who believed novel-reading to be sinful. He would "hold, that on every occasion in which the *form* is made the vehicle of truth—truth of eternal nature, truth of character, historic truth in at least its essence, and ethical truth in its bearings on the great problem of society,—it should be received with merited favour,

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—not frowned upon or rejected." We can imagine many a Puritanical head gravely shaken at this concession. Another interesting characteristic is Miller's profound admiration for Burns, both as man and poet. Yet the Kirk had never a keener and deadlier critic. On Miller's side there seems to have been always a subtle feeling of sympathy, of common lot and destiny, which broke down more conventional barriers and linked them in bonds of genius and humanity. Certainly his devotion to Burns, considering his perfervid evangelicalism and his insensibility to female charms, is one of the most curious pieces of Miller's mental furniture.

Under this head it may be finally remarked that, though not a great journalist in the technical sense, yet, if he has to be judged by his influence upon public opinion, Miller

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easily takes a place in the front rank. Probably no single man since has so powerfully moved the common mind of Scotland, or dealt with it on more familiar and decisive terms.

Miller's later years in Edinburgh can scarcely be classed among the happiest of his life. His constitution, which premature drudgery had not allowed to become robust, was ever and anon failing him under the high pressure at which he worked. The old lung weakness troubled him, and illness led to insomnia, and necessarily an irritability and shortness of temper. Yet in years he was not much past his prime. A picturesque figure indeed he must have seemed as he passed moodily and ponderously along the streets of Edinburgh, the embodiment of what Masson has styled "demonic" force.

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In figure he was tall, though his chest weakness and stooping habits had bent him; so throwing his huge head forward with its reddish hair and whiskers, and giving him in his gait a sort of clumsy slouch. From under heavy brows came the flashing of his blue-grey eyes; the nose looked small between the mass atop and the square broad jaw below. The latter with the long, thin lips hinted straight at the man within. The absurdly cherubic portrait, ideally falsified, usually prefixed to editions of *My Schools and Schoolmasters* is grotesque in its untruth. Externally he was always plainly if not roughly dressed, partly from preference, partly because of his "howking" habits in old quarries and such-like. "What a rough, strong, clever-looking man Hugh Miller is!" wrote Sir Andrew Ramsay of him in

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1850.¹ Nothing pleased him better in his wanderings than to be taken for some decent drover or craftsman, and then to flash out in all his Jovian glory as that terrible fellow the Editor of *The Witness*.

But the time and he were out of joint. He never took to ordinary Society; mere litterateurs could not be his intimates. Jeffrey had wished to see him when he came to Edinburgh; "but as he did not call on me I did not see my way to call on him, and we have not had much intercourse." The new men and the new manners he rather dreaded. He was a survival or a culmination, not a new force. There is truth in what he rather ironically says of himself. "It has perhaps been my misfortune that, somewhat curious in my reading, I have lived too much in the

¹ *Life of Ramsay*, Giekie, p. 165.

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past." Carlyle, though duly admired, made no impression on him. On all subjects his mind had been made up before he left Cromarty, and in his religious metaphysic he had a key for every lock.

But if the one love of his intellectual life had become estranged from him, the other, Science, was still true. In 1850 he was made one of the Sectional secretaries of the British Association. He had declined the offer of nomination for the Lord Rectorship of Aberdeen University. If he did not succeed in attaining his ambition to occupy the Natural History chair in Edinburgh University, he was not without strong support. The year before his death Lord Breadalbane offered him the post of Distributor of Stamps, etc., for Perthshire, an office similar to that held so long by Wordsworth in Westmoreland; but with

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characteristic conscientiousness he doubted his ability to take up a new profession at his age, and respectfully declined. In fact the clutches of the slayer were already upon him. He was hard at work on the *Testimony of the Rocks*, but the wearied brain, whipped to undue effort, was now stabbed by disease. It must have been about this period that, for the last time, he visited Dick, who tells us that he was even then subject to supernatural hallucinations about "the fairies." Moreover, adds his faithful friend, "He was sorely affected with his head, and to such a degree that neither you nor I can form any idea of his sufferings." His morbid imaginings about housebreakers were all agog once more ; soon they passed, with occasional paroxysms of excruciating pain, to belief in demoniac drivings through the darkness. In his bed-

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room "a revolver lay nightly within his reach. A broad-bladed dagger was ready to his hand. At his bed head lay a naked sword." It all ended, as, perhaps in the circumstances, was best. Miller's mania was obviously homicidal in tendency, and it was just as well that the only victim was himself. His case was hopeless ; fifty times more painful would it have been to see that ever-busy brain rotting through torture and unseemly horror in an asylum. Better, aye, unspeakably better that lonely tragedy in Portobello on the morning of Christmas Eve, 1856.

So died a strong man, an intellectual Ajax among his fellows, falling Ajax-like distraught, and by his own hand. By sheer mental power, educed by high and pure ambition, and backed by an urgent and indomitable will, he had raised himself from the humblest position to one

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of the foremost. The year before his death he had shared the honours of applause, at the opening meeting of the British Association at Glasgow, with Lucien Bonaparte—the extonemason with the prince. Yet it would be a mistake to base Miller's claims to our tribute of admiration on any one part of his work, and not rather on the unique combination of excellences which he presents as Author, Geologist, Ecclesiast and Journalist. His writings cover a wide field of fact and reflection, set down in clear, harmonious English. Surely no Scottish town has had a more charming yet philosophic historian ; no science a more vivid and elegant expositor. No more beautiful and enheartening autobiography has ever been penned ; no more honest and devoted and individual journalist ever moulded public opinion. “Scotch” in feeling and constitu-

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tion he was to the marrow of his bones ; humbly - born, independent, learned, theological : and, while it is hard to imagine Hugh Miller without his theology and his ecclesiasticism, the reflection, however futile, is forced on one that, had he been, like his friend Dick, less weighted in both respects, he would have developed into an even more striking and memorable figure than he appears in the ranks of Scottish scientists and men of letters.

THE END

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